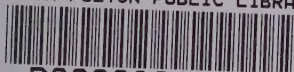
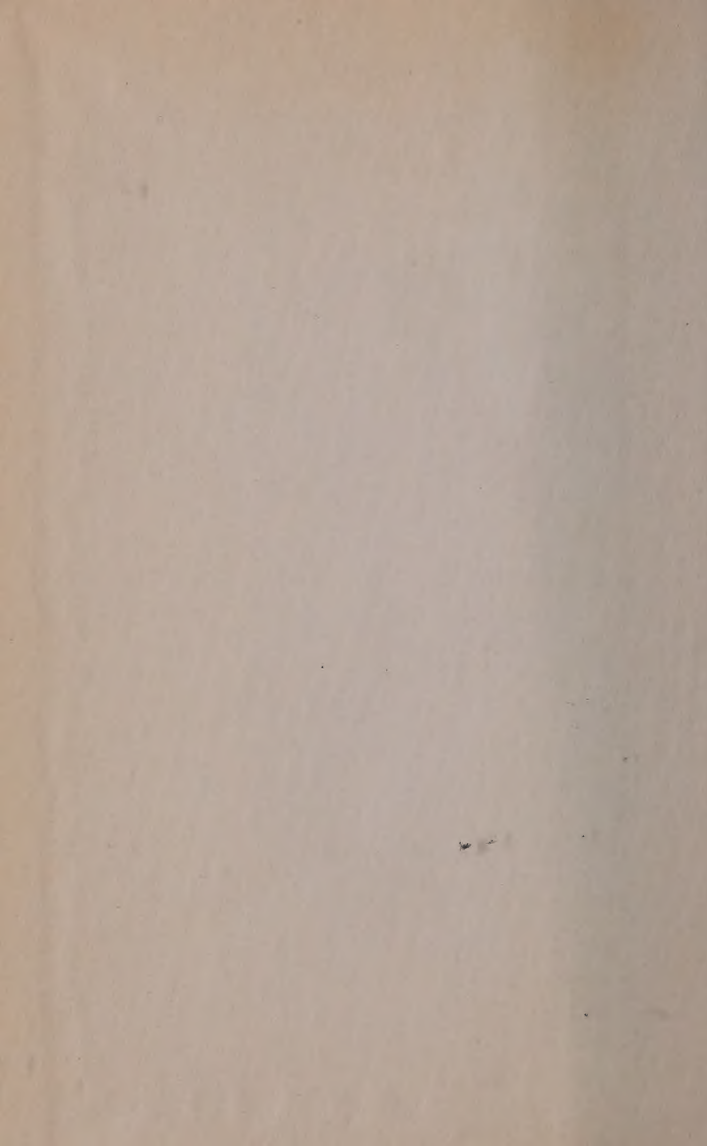
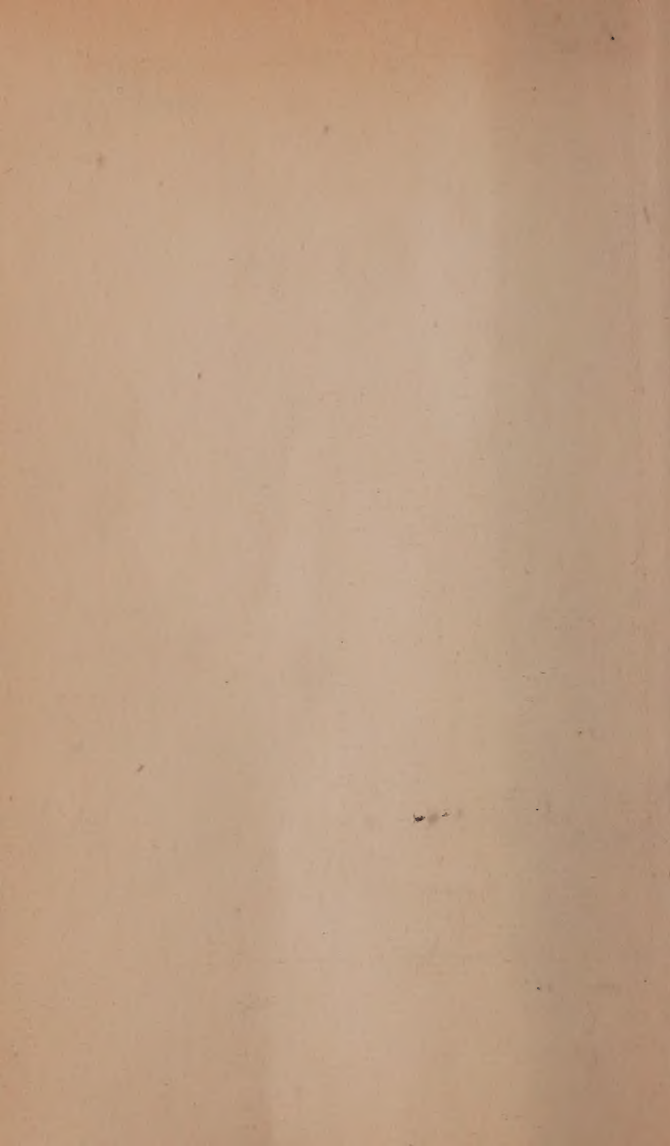


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THE DISCOVERY
A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS

Written by
(Chamberlaine)
MRS. FRANCES SHERIDAN

Adapted for the modern Stage
by
ALDOUS HUXLEY

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1924

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Sheridan

NOTE

THE DISCOVERY by Mrs. Frances
Sheridan was first acted at the Theatre
Royal, Drury Lane, and first published
in the same year, 1763

822
Sheridan

Printed in England at the
CURWEN PRESS
Plaistow, E.13

INTRODUCTION

MRS. SHERIDAN wrote at a time when the eighteenth-century public was discovering the joys of sentiment. The Man of Feeling haunted polite society; cloudily sublime, Macpherson's, Ossian went stalking, in defiance of Dr. Johnson, through the best drawing-rooms. It was the age of landscape gardening, when people of refined taste erected ruined abbeys at the end of winding walks or built across artificial rivers a broken Gothic bridge leading from nowhere to nowhere else. Parallel with the polished and sophisticated literature which we are accustomed, without much historical justification, to think of as being typically and exclusively *dix-huitième*, there grew up in the second half of the century a literature of sentiment—but of a sentiment so crude, high-flavoured, and raw that we are astonished that palates accustomed to the delicacy and refined aroma of the other literature could tolerate it. The explanation is simple: too much reasonable refinement was becoming tedious in the end. Having thirsted, people were now making themselves drunk. When it is a matter of satisfying a craving, a strong bootlegger's brew is as efficacious as a fragrant Burgundy—more efficacious indeed.

Mrs. Sheridan's *Discovery* is a specimen at one and the same time of the eighteenth-century refinement, polish, and acuteness, and of eighteenth-century emotional crudity. It is at once high comedy and low sentiment. Passages which for grace and fidelity to life are hardly to be matched in eighteenth-century comedy, are succeeded by scenes of the most jejune and conventional sentimentality. These passages, which seem to us, accustomed as we are to the refinements introduced into

the literature of sentiment by a century and a half of constant literary experiment, so boring and even positively repulsive, were clearly most moving to Mrs. Sheridan's contemporaries. Garrick declared that *The Discovery* was one of the best comedies he ever read, and its success on the stage was considerable. Tastes have changed, and though we can endorse the high opinions of her contemporaries with regard to considerable parts of Mrs. Sheridan's play, we cannot, with the best will in the world, put up with the sentimental remainder.

It is now some three or four years since Mr. Nigel Playfair gave me *The Discovery* to read. Turning over the vast rubbish heap of eighteenth-century dramatic literature, he had been agreeably surprised by the charm and freshness of the piece. Its great positive merits made him all the more regret its defects. No modern audience, he saw, would tolerate what we may call, with Edward Lear, the 'sickly suavity' of its conclusion; the whole of the last act and parts of the others were altogether too 'meloobious and genteel.' He asked me if I could make emendations which, while preserving the charming best of Mrs. Sheridan, would remedy the defects which, to modern taste at any rate, were enough to neutralize all her merits. I did my best.

To write in somebody else's manner—particularly in the manner of somebody belonging to another age and living in a remote unfamiliar world—is exceedingly difficult. During the two or three weeks that I lived with *The Discovery* I did my best to identify myself with Mrs. Sheridan, to think in her terms, to catch her turns of phrase. I fear, however, I have not been entirely successful. Reading through the proofs, I see clearly enough that my grafts, for all the pains I took to make

them so, are not of the same substance as the original. They grow, it is true, with a tolerable naturalness out of the main body of the play. But an observant eye can always detect their position, can see where they begin and end. My additions have the air of a new tail grown by a severed worm. I console myself, however, by reflecting that a certain air of incongruity between its parts may sometimes, if not exactly improve a work of art, at least make it seem odd, unexpected, and amusing.

The ghost of poor Mrs. Sheridan, meanwhile, has every right to feel indignant. I have mangled her play, hacked out the passages which she very likely thought the choicest, distorted by my additions the whole trend and tendency of the work, lowered the moral tone and suppressed whatever salutary lesson was to be learnt from the edifying conclusion. For all these crimes I beg the ghost's forgiveness. Whether she will grant it is another matter.

True, I might urge in justification that I am trying to rescue her from oblivion. But if the poor dead lady has any pride, she will say that she prefers to be dead on her own merits than 'live in Settle's numbers one day more.' It is what I should say if I heard, among the shades, that somebody was rewriting my works in the hope of making them acceptable to a new generation. No, there can be no justifying excuses: only profound apologies and the hope of grace.

ALDOUS HUXLEY



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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MEN

LORD MEDWAY

COLONEL MEDWAY, *son to Lord Medway*

SIR ANTHONY BRANVILLE

SIR HARRY FLUTTER

FOOTMAN *to Lord Medway*

CREDITOR

WOMEN

LADY MEDWAY

LOUISA, *daughter to Lord Medway*

LADY FLUTTER, *niece to Sir Anthony Branville*

MRS. KNIGHTLY, *a young widow*

MISS RICHLY, *her sister*

BETTY, *maid to Lady Medway*

SUSAN, *maid to Mrs. Knightly*

A MAIDSERVANT

THE DISCOVERY

ACT ONE

SCENE

Lord Medway's house.

*Betty, Lady Medway's maid, and Susan,
Mrs. Knightly's maid.*

BETTY. I protest, my dear, that's a marvellous fine dress you're wearing to-day. (*She feels it.*) Why, money couldn't buy a better satin than this. And 'tis new, I declare, span new. What made your mistress part with it to you?

SUSAN. Well, to tell you the truth, Miss Betty, I coveted this dress of Mrs. Knightly's from the first day she had it. Last week I could bear it no longer. 'Have it I must,' says I to myself. So I goes one morning and quietly pours a little coffee over the front of it and makes her believe 'twas she did it herself at a rout the night before. 'La, ma'am,' says I! 'tis ruined for ever. Oh, 'tis the greatest pity in the world.' 'What!' says she; 'won't the stain come out?' 'No, Mrs. Knightly, ma'am,' says I; 'there's nothing will take coffee out.' 'Oh, then,' says she, 'take the dress yourself, Susan, and do what you can with it.' 'Thank you kindly, ma'am,' says I, and off I goes at once and washes out the coffee stain with milk so that you wouldn't hardly notice it at all. See here, that's where it was. And what do you think of that for a new dress?

BETTY. Well, Susan, I must say I envy you. I wish I ever got half such good cast-offs from my lady. But I never get anything but sometimes an old black silk

ten years behind the fashion, or a flowered taffeta my lady wore when she was a girl.

SUSAN. Why, my dear, you should follow my example and make the new dresses artificially old, as I do.

BETTY. Bless you, Susan, we don't have any new dresses. Lord, girl, you don't know what straits my lord's extravagance has reduced us to here. Not a new dress for a twelvemonth at least, I do assure you.

SUSAN. My poor Betty! But why do you stay in the house a day longer?

BETTY. Why, indeed? To tell you the truth, though it do sound very old-fashioned, I think it's because—it's because I'm so much attached to my lady.

SUSAN. Very praiseworthy, I'm sure. But you mustn't allow your feelings to stand in the way of your advancement. Now I like Mrs. Knightly very well, but if she were to lose her money to-morrow, do you think I would stay with her? Not I. We have but one life, and a person must get on in this world.

BETTY. You're doubtless right, my dear. But I can't help being what I am. But tell me now, is Mrs. Knightly still so set on our young master, the Colonel?

SUSAN. Oh, she's in over the ears! 'Tis his uniform: so neat and bright, so different, too, from the other men's coats. We could never resist a uniform. I remember now—Ah, now, I remember nothing. But we have a terribly susceptible heart, Betty, terribly susceptible. But indeed, the Colonel's a fine figure of a man.

BETTY. He is that. But oh, my dear (*laying her hand on her heart*), there's a new footman come into the house to-day—Oh!

SUSAN. What, handsome?

BETTY. Oh, my dear, what a presence! And genteel—

SUSAN. Genteel, too?

BETTY. The manners of a duke, my dear. Indeed, better than a duke. For I remember not long ago a duke—a real Your Grace, you know—came to dine with my lord and got so drunk he broke half the glasses on the table and had to be carried down to his coach. Pho, my dear, send me no more dukes!

SUSAN. Away with them, I say too. But what of the footman?

BETTY. Come down with me to the pantry and you shall see him, my dear. I'll vow you'll lose your heart. But remember, Susan, I found him first; no poaching on my preserves.

SUSAN. Agreed, my dear. You know I wouldn't for the world interfere with your game.

(They are going out when they meet Lady Medway at the door, just coming in. Both curtsy.)

LADY MEDWAY. Ah, Susan. Is your mistress well this morning?

SUSAN. Oh yes, thank you kindly, my lady. She sent me with a note to Lady Flutter and I took the liberty to stop for a moment to speak with Betty here.

LADY MEDWAY. Yes, yes. Do you know, Betty, if my lord is within? *(She indicates the doors covering back stage.)*

BETTY. I saw his lordship go into his study not half an hour ago, my lady.

LADY MEDWAY. 'Tis the hour of his morning meditation. I am extremely loth to disturb him. But still—*(she coughs nervously and straightens herself up)* Go and open the door for me, Betty.

(Betty goes and flings back the doors of the back stage, revealing Lord Medway sitting in an armchair asleep. He wakes up with a start, looks round angrily. Lady Medway advances.)

The two maids quickly slip out of the room.

LORD MEDWAY. How's this, madam? Pursue me to my study, my sanctuary? I thought this place at least was to be considered by your ladyship as inviolate.

LADY MEDWAY. I hope I don't interrupt you, my dear.

LORD MEDWAY. I should be glad, Lady Medway, that we remembered our respective bounds. I never intrude on your tea table or toilet, and I desire my hours of serious study may be held as sacred by you.

LADY MEDWAY. I beg your pardon, my lord, but indeed you have made me so exceedingly unhappy by this sudden resolution you have taken in regard to marrying your daughter, that I can find rest nowhere.

LORD MEDWAY. Madam, I did not expect this idle opposition from you, especially when you know my motives to this marriage.

LADY MEDWAY. My lord, you have not yet explained them to me. I can only guess at large.

LORD MEDWAY. You know I am harassed with debts, and I tell you frankly, ma'am, I don't know where to raise another five hundred pounds, if it would save me from perdition. And pray, let me ask your ladyship, do you know anyone besides Sir Anthony Branville who will take your daughter without a fortune; for I am not, and probably never shall be, able to give her one.

LADY MEDWAY. Louisa is very young, my lord; why need we be so precipitate? Besides, if this match between Mrs. Knightly and your son should take place, it will then be in your power to provide for your daughter.

LORD MEDWAY. There's a right woman! A hint is but just started, and you pursue it, run it down and seize it at once. I have not yet so much as proposed

the thing to my son. Perhaps he may not like the lady when I do; and I presume you will think his inclinations as proper to be consulted as those of the young lady his sister.

LADY MEDWAY. Certainly, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, no doubt, on't; love matches against the world! and so I suppose you would recommend it to me to let Miss please herself in the choice of a husband, as her mamma did before her?

LADY MEDWAY. That reproach from you, my lord, is not kind. But I do not desire you to let her please herself in choosing one she likes; only do not force her to take one she hates.

LORD MEDWAY. Has she told you that she hates Sir Anthony?

LADY MEDWAY. Not in express words; but the repugnance she shows.

LORD MEDWAY. Perhaps she loves some one else.

LADY MEDWAY. To tell you the truth, my lord, I believe she does.

LORD MEDWAY. And pray, who may be the happy man?

LADY MEDWAY. Young Branville, Sir Anthony's nephew, who is now on his travels and is not expected home these many months.

LORD MEDWAY. That puts him, very fortunately, out of the way of our romantic young daughter. But look ye, madam, let us speak reasonably. I cannot give her a shilling; Sir Anthony is ready to take her as she is, and, if they should have a family, is able to provide liberally for them all. On the contrary, if she follows her own inclinations in marrying Mr. Branville, in three or four years time I shall have the pleasure of seeing myself the grandpapa to two or three pretty

little beggars who, between their mother's silliness and their father's poverty, will probably continue so all their lives.

LADY MEDWAY. But, my lord, Sir Anthony has sent his nephew abroad at his own expense, and it looks as if he meant to do something handsome by him; besides, he is his uncle's heir in case he should die without children by marriage.

LORD MEDWAY. And so you think you can keep him in a state of celibacy by refusing him your daughter. Oh, fie, Lady Medway, I never heard you argue so weakly. Sir Anthony is not yet past the prime of life. Besides, he has owned to me, it was his being discarded by Mrs. Knightly which made him resolve at once, in a sort of pique, to marry the first girl that fell in his way—birth and reputation being all the fortune he desired with her. A man thus circumstanced is very unlikely to continue a bachelor. No, no, I'll take him in the humour and secure him for Louisa while I may.

LADY MEDWAY. Before it be too late, my lord, let me beseech you to reflect on the misery of a married life where, on either side, love or esteem is wanting. Have we not a glaring instance of this in the house with us now—in Sir Harry Flutter and his wife? Are they not as wretched a pair as ever met in wedlock?

LORD MEDWAY. You have made a very unlucky choice in your example, ma'am. A foolish boy and a giddy girl that know not, either of them, what they would be at. He married the wife his mother chose for him, to get rid of his tutor; and she took the husband her wise father provided for her to escape from a boarding school. What can be expected from two such sim-pletons? He, proud of the authority of a husband,

exercises it from the same principle, and with pretty much the same capacity that children show with regard to poor little animals in their power—in teasing and controlling them; and this he thinks makes him look manly.

LADY MEDWAY. So I imagine, for I have heard him say he does no more than other husbands.

LORD MEDWAY. She, on the other hand, fancies the prerogatives of a wife consist in contradicting and opposing him; and this I presume she thinks is doing like other wives; but my life for it, when they know a little more of the world they will be very happy.

LADY MEDWAY. Never in each other, I am afraid, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. That may be, but prithee, let us have done with this subject at once. One word more, however; if the marriage between our son and Mrs. Knightly should be accomplished, I have other purposes to appropriate her fortune to than buying a husband for your daughter. But this is only in speculation: the thing may never happen; for nothing but the last extremity should compel me to urge my son against his inclinations. As for Louisa, in two words, I will be obeyed; do me the honour to tell her as much. I shall see her presently and expect such an answer from her as her duty dictates.

LADY MEDWAY. My lord, it is an unpleasant task you have assigned me, but I will obey. *(Exit.)*

LORD MEDWAY. That you have always done, so much praise I will allow you. But I am out of humour with everything. 'Sdeath, what a thing it is to have poverty staring a man in the face! If this boy should dislike the match, I am undone at once. But enough, why should I anticipate my troubles? I have enough

in the present without looking forward to those that are to come. And now this little Flutter child. 'Tis a pretty time for a man to think of intrigues and gallantry, and yet the provocative beauty of that little madcap, with all her childishness about her, has caught such a hold on me that I must have her. Oh, with what alacrity could I now pursue the chase if my thoughts were a little more disengaged! She has been complaining to my wife of her husband's ill-usage of her; and he, I suppose, will soon be coming to me for a little advice to enable him to use her worse. He shan't want my assistance. And here, indeed, he comes to receive it. If he follows my advice (*enter Sir Harry Flutter*) she cannot but come to hate him—and then I step in as her comforter.

SIR HARRY. Oh, my dear lord!

LORD MEDWAY. Why, you seem out of breath, Sir Harry; what's the matter?

SIR HARRY. Upon my word, my lord, I have been so stunned this morning with the din of conjugal interrogatories that I am quite bated. Do let me lounge a little on this couch of yours.

LORD MEDWAY. What, I suppose you were playing the rogue last night!

SIR HARRY. No, faith, only at the tavern. I was home before three o'clock, and yet my wife was such an unreasonable little devil as to ask me forty questions about my staying out so late.

LORD MEDWAY. It's the way of them all. But I hope you are too well acquainted with your own prerogatives to give her any satisfaction on this account.

SIR HARRY. Satisfaction! Oh, catch me at that! No, no, no! But pray now, my lord, how would you

behave on such an occasion? For I should be very glad to find my conduct squared with yours.

LORD MEDWAY. Why, not roughly: you know that is not my way; it is not manly. Besides, it would at once provoke and justify your wife in her resentment. But there is a sort of sneering, ironical treatment that I never knew fail of nettling a woman to the quick; and the best of it is the thing won't bear repetition. For let them deliver your very words, without the tone and air accompanying them, and there shall not appear the least harm in them.

SIR HARRY. Ay, that's the secret I want to come at; that's the true art of tormenting, and of all the talents your lordship possesses I envy you most for that. Heavens, how I have seen Lady Medway swell, and tears start into her eyes when, devil take me, if I thought you were not in perfect good humour. Now I am rather petulant—flash, flash, flash, as quick as lightning, till I put myself into a confounded passion, when I only meant to vex her. Though I think I was rather temperate, too, this morning.

LORD MEDWAY. How was it, let's hear?

SIR HARRY. Why, I came home at three o'clock, as I told you, a little tipsy, too, by the bye; but what was that to her, you know, for I am always good-humoured in my cups! To bed I crept as softly as a mouse, for I had no more thought of quarrelling with her then than I have now with your lordship. 'La,' says she, with a great heavy sigh, 'it is a sad thing that one must be disturbed in this manner.' And on she went, mutter, mutter, mutter, for a quarter of an hour, I all the while lying as quiet as a lamb without making her a word of answer. At last, quite tired of her perpetual buzzing in my ear, 'Prythee be quiet,

Mrs. Wasp,' says I, 'and let me sleep.' I was not thoroughly awake when I spoke. 'Do so, Mr. Drone,' says she, and gave a great flounce. I said no more, for in two minutes I was as fast as a top. Just now, when I came down to breakfast, she was sitting at the tea table all alone and looked so neat and so cool and so pretty that, e'gad! not thinking of what had passed, I was going to give her a kiss; when up she tossed her demure little face. 'You were a pretty fellow last night, Sir Harry,' says she. 'So I am every night, I hope, ma'am,' says I, making her a very low bow. Was not that something in your manner, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, very good, very good.

SIR HARRY. 'Pray, where were you till that unconscionable hour?' says she. 'At the tavern, drinking,' says I, very civilly. 'And who was with you, sir?' 'Oh,' thought I, 'I'll match you for your inquisitiveness;' so I named your lordship and a dozen more wild fellows—whom, by the way, I had not so much as seen—'and two or three girls of the town,' added I, whistling and looking another way.

LORD MEDWAY. That was just a little too much, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Down she slapped her cup and saucer. 'If this be the case, Sir Harry,' says she, half sobbing, 'I shall desire a separate bed.' 'That's as I please, ma'am,' sticking my hand in my side and looking her full in the face. 'No, it shall be as I please, sir.' 'It shan't, madam.' 'It shall, sir.' And it shan't and it shall and it shall and it shan't was bandied backwards and forwards till we were both out of breath with passion. At last she said something to provoke me; I don't know what it was, but I answered her a little

tartly. You would not have said it, I know—I'd give the world for your command of temper—but it slipped out, faith—

LORD MEDWAY. What was it?

SIR HARRY. Why, I said—for she vexed me cursedly—

I said, faith, I think I—I as good as told her she lied.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, fie!

SIR HARRY. She burst out crying, I kicked over the tea-table and away I scampered up to your lordship to receive advice and consolation.

LORD MEDWAY. Why really, Sir Harry, I pity you. To be tied to such a little termagant is the devil; but 'tis the fortune of wedlock. One thing I have always observed: the more a husband submits, the more a wife tyrannizes. 'Twas my own case at first; but I was soon obliged to alter my course, and by exerting myself a little I brought Lady Medway to be as well behaved, I think, as any woman of quality in town.

SIR HARRY. So she is, upon my word, my lord; I'd change with you with all my heart, if her ladyship were a little younger!

LORD MEDWAY. But how do you intend to act with regard to Lady Flutter? I suppose this little breach will be made up like all the rest?

SIR HARRY. Not by me, I assure you, my lord. I don't intend to speak to her to-day, and when I do, she shall ask my pardon before I forgive her.

LORD MEDWAY. Pooh, that's children's play: fall out and then, 'Pray, pray, let's kiss and be friends.' No, Sir Harry, if you would show yourself a man and a husband, let her see that you despise her girlish petulance by taking no further notice of it. Now, if I were in your case, I'd behave just as if nothing at all had happened. If she pouts, smile: and ask her how

she likes your new sword knot or the point in your ruffles or any other idle question. You know she must give you an answer. If it be a peevish one, laugh in her face, take up your hat and wish her a good morning. If, on the contrary, she speaks with good humour, seem not to hear her, but walk about the room repeating verses or humming a song. Then, as if you had not observed her before: 'Did you speak to me, Lady Flutter?' but without waiting for a reply, slide out of the room humming a tune. Now all this, you see, were she to relate it, will not have the appearance of ill-treatment; and yet, my life for yours, it humbles her far more than all the blustering airs you could put on.

SIR HARRY. I am sure you are right, my lord. The case is plain; but the difficulty is in executing the thing properly, for I am so warm in my temper. Oh, what would I not give for your glorious cool sneer of contempt! I'll try for it positively; and, egad, I'll now go to her and make the experiment; and so, my lord, adieu for the present and thanks for this lesson.

LORD MEDWAY (*ringing the bell*). Do you dine at home to-day, Sir Harry?

SIR HARRY. I don't know how that may be till I have reconnoitred. Your lordship, I know, does not, and I hate to dine alone with the women.

(*Enter Footman.*)

LORD MEDWAY (*surveying him critically*). Ah, so you're the new footman?

FOOTMAN. Yes, your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. Well, I trust you understand what is required of you here.

FOOTMAN. I hope so, your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. What's your name, sirrah?

FOOTMAN. James, your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. Then you shall be called John. Step up, John, and desire your young mistress to come and speak with me here.

FOOTMAN. Desire my young mistress to come and speak with your lordship here? Yes, your lordship.
(*Exit.*)

LORD MEDWAY. Your pardon, Sir Harry. 'Tis true, I dine out to-day, but I shall be home very soon after dinner, for I shall long to know on what terms you and my lady may be by that time.

SIR HARRY. Oh, heaven knows—we may be at cuffs by then, perhaps.

LORD MEDWAY. Come, I'll go with you to the battlefield and spy out the first movements of the opposing armies. If you follow my advice, Sir Harry, the victory is infallibly yours.
(*Exeunt.*)
(*Enter Footman, who holds open the door for Louisa.*)

LOUISA. Did his lordship say the library?

FOOTMAN. He did, madam. His lordship must have left the room with Sir Harry.

LOUISA. Then I'll wait for him here. Make up the fire, please. (*She sits at the table and reads.*)
(*Footman makes up the fire.*)

FOOTMAN. Louisa!

LOUISA (*starts*). How dare you, sir! Leave the room at once or I shall go and tell his lordship to have you thrown out of the house immediately.

FOOTMAN. Louisa—don't you know me?

LOUISA (*looking at him closely*). What? Branville! My Branville (*she almost swoons*). |

FOOTMAN. Calm yourself, dearest Louisa.

LOUISA. But how came you here, Branville? and in this guise? I thought you were a thousand miles away,

and you are here, in my father's house—and a footman!

FOOTMAN. You would not be thus surprised, Louisa, if you knew how insupportable to me is my existence when I have to drag it out far from your dear presence. To me the Grand Tour was a source of misery and not of delight, because it took me away from you. Without you at my side to share the spectacle, the picturesque beauties of nature and of art were nothing to me. The Alps to me were no more than a row of arid and hideous protuberances. The ruins of imperial Rome a heap of mouldering rubbish. The glowing canvases of Guido left me cold. I could think only of my Louisa's lovelier charms.

LOUISA. Oh, Branville, Branville!

FOOTMAN. Arrived at Vienna, I could bear it no longer. The German language, the cold, the smell of beer and tobacco at the inn were the last drop that made my cup of misery overflow. I took post and hastened incontinently homeward, without baiting for more than an hour at any place on my road. And here I am.

LOUISA. Here you are!

FOOTMAN. Not a soul knows of my return but you, Louisa.

LOUISA. But a footman in my father's house! What madness has made you travesty yourself thus?

FOOTMAN. Madness, indeed, Louisa, the madness of my extreme passion. (*He embraces her.*) I could not live without a sight of you, and I dared not show myself openly; for I should have incurred my uncle's displeasure for having returned without his knowledge or consent. There was but one course open: I bribed one of your father's footmen to give notice and

took his place myself. And now I am perpetually near you, my Louisa. "

LOUISA. But your menial duties, Branville?

FOOTMAN. I perform them without repugnance, since it is for you, Louisa, that I am working.

LOUISA. Oh, Branville, Branville. I cannot bear to see you doing these degrading tasks. Let me help you—nay, do! For I assure you I know how to mend a fire so much better than you do.

FOOTMAN. No, no, Louisa, I beg you to remember our respective stations in this house. We must never be seen to have the slightest conversation, save what might naturally pass between a lady and her servant. It is time for me to retire; your father will be returning in a moment.

LOUISA. Oh, Branville, if you but knew the subject on which he is to speak to me. I came here trembling in anticipation of the interview. But the delight of seeing you caused me for a moment to forget my fears. My father—Oh, Branville, it is too dreadful. (*She weeps.*)

FOOTMAN. Louisa! Come—don't make me unhappy too. Tell me the cause of these tears.

LOUISA. My father intends to marry me.

FOOTMAN. Marry you? To whom?

LOUISA. To your uncle—Sir Anthony.

FOOTMAN. My uncle? But I left him safe in Mrs. Knightly's keeping.

LOUISA. Mrs. Knightly has discarded him, it seems, and he is resolved to avenge her cruelty by marrying another.

FOOTMAN. And are you his choice?

LOUISA. I happened to be the first marriageable member of my sex he came upon.

FOOTMAN. And Lord Medway approves?

LOUISA. He does; he is even eager to consummate the match. Sir Anthony is rich, and my father hopes to remedy the defects in his own fortune by the excess of his son-in-law's. My mother has told me that he is determined to be obeyed.

FOOTMAN. What a fate is ours! Why was I born penniless and dependent? My uncle! (*Laughs.*) This would be a farce if it had happened to some one else. But our own affairs are always tragedies.

LOUISA. Hist! I hear my father coming down the stairs. Tell me, quick, what shall I do, what shall I say?

FOOTMAN. Seem to consent, acquiesce, but procrastinate. We must gain time. I will find a way out. Trust me, Louisa, and farewell. (*He picks up the coal scuttle and goes out.*) (*Exit.*)

(*Louisa sits at the table again and pretends to go on reading.*)

(*Enter Lord Medway, who stops at the door and looks at her.*)

LORD MEDWAY (*repeating affectedly*).

On every hill, in every grove,
Along the margin of each stream,
Dear conscious scenes of former love—
I mourn, and Damon is my theme.

And pray, what's your pretty tender heart ruminating upon? Your Damon, I suppose. Were you not thinking of Mr. Branville?

LOUISA. No, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. I believe you don't tell truth, my lady. Look up, girl. Ah, Louisa, Louisa, that conscious blush! but 'tis well you have the grace to be ashamed.

LOUISA. My lord, if I do blush, I am not conscious of any cause, unless the fear of offending you.

LORD MEDWAY. Pretty innocent! All obedience, too, I warrant. I hate hypocrisy from my very soul; you know you are a rebel in the bottom of your heart. Speak honestly now, would you not run away with Branville this very night if it were in your power?

LOUISA. My lord, I—I—

LORD MEDWAY. 'My lord, I...I——' Speak out, mistress.

LOUISA. If I had your permission, my lord, I own I should be—inclined to prefer him to—any other.

LORD MEDWAY. Thou prevaricating monkey! And without my permission, miss; what answer does your modesty and filial piety suggest to that?

LOUISA. That without it, I will never marry at all.

LORD MEDWAY. I don't believe one syllable of that; but I take you at your word; and now I tell you that you shall never have it to marry *him*. How does your lovesick heart relish that?

LOUISA. My lord, I am resigned to your pleasure. (*She curtsies and offers to go; he bows and lets her walk as far as the door.*)

LORD MEDWAY. Now, ma'am, walk back again, if you please; for I have not done with you yet. Whither were you swimming with that sweet languishing air, like an Arcadian princess?

LOUISA. I was going to my chamber, my lord, if you had not forbid it.

LORD MEDWAY. Forbid? Fie, what an ungenteel word to use towards a heroine in romance! Sit down there. What, you are not going to faint, I hope? Oh, I d-i-e! I ex-pire—Branville, take my last adieu. Here Betty, some hartshorn for the despairing nymph.

Your mistress is dying for love. So, so, so, the sluice is let out at last. You really look very pretty when you cry, Louisa, I had a mind to see how it would become you.

LOUISA. Indeed, my lord, you are too hard upon me.

LORD MEDWAY. How now, mistress, how dare you speak thus? What do you call a hardship? Love makes some timorous animals bold, they say; it certainly makes women so with a vengeance.

LOUISA. My lord, I beg your permission to withdraw.

LORD MEDWAY. Stay where you are, madam. When I condescend to talk with you, methinks you ought to know it is your duty to attend to what I have to say. You know my mind already in regard to young Branville. I forbid you to think—but even to think—of him. That is the first, and perhaps the hardest, part of my command. The next is that you resolve immediately to accept of Sir Anthony for your husband. And now, miss, you may, if you please, retire to your chamber and in plaintive strains, either in prose or verse, bemoan your hard fate; and be sure you complain to your waiting-woman what a tyrant you have in your father. Go, get you gone.

(Exit Louisa.)

This is the plague of having daughters; no sooner out of their leading strings than in love—and always with the wrong man. I only count myself lucky that her passion is not for some handsome young groom or footman.

(Enter Colonel Medway.)

Oh, George, I am glad you are come. That foolish girl has ruffled me so, I want relief from my own thoughts.

COLONEL. I met my sister in tears. I hope, my lord, she has done nothing to disoblige you.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, a mere trifle—only confessed a passion for a fellow not worth sixpence, and, like a prudent as well as dutiful child, shown a thorough dislike of her father's choice.

COLONEL. My lord, she will consider better of it; I am sure my sister will willingly obey you in everything.

LORD MEDWAY. To what purpose is a father's solicitude for the welfare of his children if a perverse silly girl will counteract all his projects? You, Medway, have ever shown yourself an affectionate, as well as an obedient son to a parent, who confesses himself, with regard to you, not one of the most provident. I wish I could make you amends.

COLONEL. My lord, I wish for no other amends than to see you easy in your mind and in your circumstances.

LORD MEDWAY. That's well said. But I expected as much from you. Suppose, now, that it were in your power to make me easy in both and effectually to serve yourself?

COLONEL. I wish it were, my lord. But I am afraid there is nothing now in my power.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, you are mistaken, there are ways and means to retrieve all, and it was on this subject that I wanted to talk to you. There is a certain lady of fortune, son—what, droop at the very mention of her? That's an ill omen.

COLONEL. My lord, I doubt my fortune can ever be mended by those means.

LORD MEDWAY. No? Suppose the Widow Knightly, with a real estate of three thousand a year and a personal one of fifty thousand pounds, should have taken a fancy to you; would not that be a means? You blush; perhaps you are already acquainted with the lady's passion.

COLONEL. My lord, I am glad to see you so pleasant.

LORD MEDWAY. I am serious, I assure you. Why, is there anything so extraordinary in a widow falling in love with a handsome young fellow like you?

COLONEL. My lord, if the lady has really done me that honour, 'tis more than I deserve; for I never made the least advances.

LORD MEDWAY. Well, but how do you like her?

COLONEL. She is genteel, I think; but I never really examined her features.

LORD MEDWAY. That's strange! Why, you visit her sometimes, I know.

COLONEL. I go to her house, my lord, but 'tis her younger sister I visit.

LORD MEDWAY. Humph! what sort of a damsel is she?

COLONEL. A most angelic creature.

LORD MEDWAY. Then it seems you have examined her features.

COLONEL. My lord, I have known her long. Miss Richly, who, as well as her sister, was born abroad, was sent hither some years since for her education, and I became acquainted with her in the house of a friend of mine, with whom she lived. Mrs. Knightly, who had married an English merchant, was then settled at Lisbon and knew but little of her sister till lately; when, having lost her husband, she came to England and took the young lady under her own care.

LORD MEDWAY. So? I perceive you know their history.

COLONEL. I do, my lord. Poor Miss Richly's part of it is a melancholy one. For her father was so partial to his elder daughter that he left her by much the greater portion of his estate; and what the younger had to her share she had the misfortune to lose, owing

to the breaking of a merchant in whose hands the money lay.

LORD MEDWAY. Very interesting, I'm sure. You are better informed than I am. But what do you think of Mrs. Knightly?

COLONEL. Think, my lord? I really don't know what to think. The lady is very deserving, but—

LORD MEDWAY. But? Oh, these damned buts! Am I to be butted by you all one after another? There's your mother first: to be sure she's very willing to acquiesce in everything I approve, but she thinks it hard a young creature should have any force put on her inclinations, though it be for her own good. Then Miss Louisa—she is all obedience and submission; but alas! she has given away her heart already. And you—you, too, are perfectly disposed to oblige me, but you will choose for yourself, I presume, notwithstanding.

COLONEL. My lord, I own I love Miss Richly, have loved her long; and I hope I do not flatter myself when I say that she loves me too.

LORD MEDWAY. I am sorry for it. Oh, son, son, a pretty face will not redeem our acres—but we will say no more on the subject. I will not urge you on so tender a point.

COLONEL. My lord, I thank you.

(Enter footman.)

FOOTMAN. My lord, there is a gentleman below very insistent to see your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. Who is he?

FOOTMAN. He would not give his name, my lord, but claimed that he had a long acquaintance with your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. And what manner of man is this gentleman?

FOOTMAN. He seemed respectable, my lord, but hardly—hardly—

(The door bursts open and the Creditor bounces in.)

CREDITOR. Hardly, hardly—ay, that's the word. For it's hardly I've been treated, I can tell you. My lord—*(he pulls a paper out of his pocket)*.

LORD MEDWAY *(to Colonel)*. 'Sdeath, 'tis my tailor! You see, Medway, what crosses I have to bear. And 'tis in your power to relieve me of them. *(To Creditor.)* Well, sir, may I ask what you want of me?

CREDITOR. Three hundred and seventeen pounds six shillings and fourpence, to be precise, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Indeed! Take a seat, sir.

CREDITOR. Thank you, my lord, I prefer to stand.

LORD MEDWAY *(sitting down)*. As you will. You mentioned a trifling sum, sir, which it seems I have overlooked.

CREDITOR. You have overlooked it for two and a half years now, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Indeed, indeed. Very curious, I'm sure. And you would like me to pay it, no doubt?

CREDITOR. No doubt, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. You do not chance to have three hundred pounds on you, Medway, I suppose?

COLONEL. Indeed I have not, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. At the moment neither have I. But in a week or two's time you shall have satisfaction.

CREDITOR. I must have satisfaction now, my lord, immediately. I am a poor man, I have a wife and three children, and am almost hourly expecting a fourth. I'll have satisfaction at once, my lord, if I have to go to law to get it. There's still justice in England, I hope.

LORD MEDWAY. My dear sir, there never was. Put all

idea of law and justice out of your head and look at the case reasonably. You say you have a wife and three, potentially four, children. I have a wife too, and a couple of children. I also have a title which is more costly to keep than three wives and ten children. I know the pinch of poverty as well as you. I must have time, man.

CREDITOR. And I must have money, sir. Without it I am undone, and my poor wife, who even at this very moment—

LORD MEDWAY. Have patience, sir. (*He leans forward confidentially.*) Within a week both my children will have married money.

COLONEL. I protest, my lord, not both.

LORD MEDWAY. Sh! George, sh! Come again in a week, sir, you shall be paid in full.

CREDITOR. In full, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. Every penny, sir. I am a man of my word.

CREDITOR. God bless you, my lord. I always knew you for a good, kind-hearted gentleman. How shall I thank you?

LORD MEDWAY. Speak no more of it, my good man, I need no thanks. The consciousness of a good deed is its own reward.

CREDITOR. Good morning to your lordship, and thank you with all my heart, sir. Good morning to you, sir, good morning, good morning. (*Exit.*)

LORD MEDWAY. Good morning. Oh, damnation—!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE

*Lord Medway's house; a dressing room.
Sir Harry Flutter, in his shirt sleeves, looking in
the glass and stroking his chin.
Footman cleaning razor and brush.*

SIR HARRY. I declare, I am heartily tired of this continual shaving. My beard comes quicker and harder every day. Why, a month or two since, I used to shave but every two days; soon I shall have to shave twice in a day.

FOOTMAN. 'Tis very natural, sir. Like good sense and discretion, a beard comes with age—though 'tis true the beard sometimes outstrips the discretion.

SIR HARRY. 'Faith, it does. I have known a score of stubbly chins that belonged to as arrant rattle-pated schoolboys as ever breathed. With me, thank God, 'twas the other way: my discretion grew before my beard.

FOOTMAN. Very true, sir. I had already noted it, sir.

SIR HARRY. These ruffles now—I'm at a loss to know if they suit me or not. Let me see them again.

(Footman holds up the ruffles.)

H'm, I can't decide between 'em.

FOOTMAN. 'Tis a grave matter, sir, in which a choice must not be made too lightly. These I hold in my right hand are the more—how shall I say it?—the more ornate; those in my left are the more chaste and severe. If I might make so bold, sir, I would suggest that the choice should depend on what your honour intends to do. If to take tea with the ladies, then these *(he lifts up those in his right)*. If to drink with

the gentlemen, then 'twere best if your honour inclined towards the plainer ones. They are the more manly, sir, undoubtedly.

SIR HARRY. Very just, very just. I find, John, you are a fellow of some sense.

FOOTMAN. Thank you, sir.

SIR HARRY. I'll wear the plain ruffles then. For I am resolved to go a-drinking to-night. Not that I have any desire to drink, but I have to give my wife another lesson. By the bye, is Lady Flutter come in yet, do you know?

FOOTMAN. Her ladyship did not go out at all, sir.

SIR HARRY. Not at all? Why, I understood she dined abroad.

FOOTMAN. No, sir. I believe she only ordered Mrs. Betty to say so for an excuse, because she had no mind to come down to dinner.

SIR HARRY. Ha! So that's it, is it? Help me on with my coat. And now do you step up to her ladyship's room and tell her I desire to speak with her—on very particular business, tell her.

(Exit Footman.)

Now to put my lesson in practice . . . if I can but hit on the manner. I'll pretend not to see her first, so—*(He walks about posturing.)* But what if she did not come now—that would be too provoking. No, faith, here she is.

(Enter Lady Flutter, with knitting in her hand.)

LADY FLUTTER *(sullenly)*. What do you want with me, Sir Harry?

SIR HARRY. I want with you, Lady Flutter? I never wanted anything with you in my life that I know of.

LADY FLUTTER. Why, didn't you send for me this minute and say you had particular business? I

shouldn't have been so ready to come else, I can assure you.

SIR HARRY. How do you like this new suit of clothes, my dear? Don't you think it vastly elegant?

LADY FLUTTER. Was that all the business you had with me? (*She offers to go.*)

SIR HARRY. Ma'am, I insist on your not going till you have answered my question . . . civilly or uncivilly, how you please. I am prepared for either, I can tell you.

LADY FLUTTER. Indeed, Sir Harry, I suppose you think, with these airs, that you can carry off your behaviour to me this morning.

SIR HARRY (*walking about and singing*).

Ye gods, ye gave to me a wife
Out of your grace and favour.

LADY FLUTTER. But I can tell you, sir, I won't bear such treatment—to be drawn on and off like your glove.

SIR HARRY. Were you speaking to me, ma'am?

LADY FLUTTER. To whom else should I be speaking?

SIR HARRY. I protest; I did not know you were in the room, child.

LADY FLUTTER. Child, indeed! Oh, ridiculous affectation!

SIR HARRY (*aside*). Oh, now it begins to work. If I can but keep cool . . .

But if your providence divine
For greater bliss design her,
T' obey your will, at any time,
I'm ready to resign her.

LADY FLUTTER. Absurd!

SIR HARRY (*going up close to her*). To resign her, to resign her.

LADY FLUTTER (*pushing him away*). Stupid!

SIR HARRY (*drawing himself up*). Ay, madam?

LADY FLUTTER. Ay, indeed, sir.

SIR HARRY. Retire to your chamber, madam, directly, instantly; and let me inform you, once for all, that you are not to take the liberty of coming into my dressing room. A man's serious hours are not to be broke in upon by female impertinence.

LADY FLUTTER. A man's serious hours . . . ? Ha, ha, ha!

SIR HARRY. These flippant airs don't become you in the least, ma'am. But I don't think a silly girl worth my serious resentment. Retire with your trumpery work. I choose to be alone.

LADY FLUTTER (*sitting down*). Then I'll stay to vex you.

SIR HARRY. Then, ma'am, I must teach you the obedience that is due to the commands of a husband.

LADY FLUTTER. A husband? Oh, gracious, defend me from such a husband! A hoop and a bag of marbles would be fitter for you than a wife, I fancy.

SIR HARRY. And let me tell your pertness, a doll would be properer for you than a husband—there's for you, miss (*losing his temper*).

LADY FLUTTER. You'll be a boy all your life, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. And you'll be a fool all your life, Lady Snap.

LADY FLUTTER. I shall be the fitter company for you, then.

SIR HARRY. Tchoo! Tchoo! Tchoo! (*Jeering her*.)

LADY FLUTTER. You are vastly polite, sir. Did you ever see Lord Medway behave thus to his lady?

SIR HARRY. And did you ever see Lady Medway behave thus to her lord, if it comes to that? Rat me, a man had better be a galley slave than married to a simpleton that ought to be sewing her sampler.

LADY FLUTTER. And I'll swear a woman had better be a ballad singer than yoked to a Jack-a-dandy that ought to have a satchel at his back and be whipped every morning.)

SIR HARRY. Devil take me, but I have a good mind to break every bit of the china you bought this morning.

LADY FLUTTER. Do, do, do, and make taws of them to play with.

SIR HARRY. You provoking, impertinent little . . .

LADY FLUTTER. How dare you call me names, sir? I won't be called names; I'll tell my papa of this, so I will.

SIR HARRY. Cry, baby, cry . . .

(Enter Lord Medway.)

For shame! Wipe your eyes, don't let him see you thus. (*Aside to Lady Flutter.*)

LADY FLUTTER. I don't care who sees me; I'll bear it no longer. I'll write to my papa to send for me. I'll go to my uncle Branville this very night.

LORD MEDWAY. Lady Flutter! I am sorry to find you thus, ma'am; I didn't know you had been at home, Sir Harry—I ask your pardon, perhaps I intrude?—no afflicting news, I hope?

SIR HARRY. News? Oh, no, there's nothing new in the case, I assure you, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Then, Sir Harry, I am afraid you are in fault here.

LADY FLUTTER (*sobbing*). Indeed, my lord, he is always in fault.

SIR HARRY. If your lordship will take her word for it.

LORD MEDWAY. I should be glad to mediate between you, but I really don't know how, unless I were informed of the cause of your quarrel.

SIR HARRY. I'll tell you, my lord . . .

LADY FLUTTER. No, I'll tell him, sir . . .

SIR HARRY. Look'ee there now.

LADY FLUTTER. He sent for me, my lord.

SIR HARRY. Not I, indeed, my lord.

LADY FLUTTER. I say you did, Sir Harry, on purpose to tease me and talk nonsense to me. . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, fie, Sir Harry. Talk nonsense? This is a sad account.

SIR HARRY. 'Faith, my lord, a man must unbend sometimes. He cannot always be grave.

LADY FLUTTER. And there he went on, repeating silly verses, to show he wanted to get rid of me.

SIR HARRY. Mere raillery, my lord; but she can't understand it, poor thing.

LADY FLUTTER. I shouldn't have minded that, neither, for I could be even with him in his gibing airs. But at last he began calling me names, downright abusive names, my lord. But I'll put an end to it at once.
(*Goes to the glass and dries her eyes.*)

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Sir Harry*). All wrong, all wrong. Was this the advice I gave you?

SIR HARRY. My lord, you can't imagine how provoking she was.

LADY FLUTTER. I daresay my papa will be very ready to take me home again.

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Sir Harry*). This must be prevented; yet do not you condescend to desire her to stay. I'll try to persuade her.)

SIR HARRY. Ough! She's a vixen!

(*Lady Flutter rings a bell.*)

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Sir Harry*). Give me the opportunity of talking with her, and I'll engage to establish your empire over her.)

SIR HARRY. 'Faith, I wish you would; for I am utterly weary of the struggle.

(Enter Footman.)

LADY FLUTTER. Are my chairmen in the way?

FOOTMAN. I'll see, madam.

LADY FLUTTER. If they are, order them to get ready.

(Exit Footman.)

LORD MEDWAY. What, going a-visiting so soon, Lady Flutter?

LADY FLUTTER. Only to my Uncle Branville's, my lord. It is only proper to acquaint him with my determination.

LORD MEDWAY *(aside to Sir Harry)*. Quickly, make some excuse to leave us, or all will be over.

SIR HARRY *(aside)*. I will. Do your best with her. *(Aloud)* Bless me! Well, I am sure-ly the most thoughtless fellow breathing. *(He takes out his pocket-book and turns over the pages.)* My lord, can you forgive my rudeness, if I run away from you now? I must show you the nature of my engagement, though, and that, I hope, will be some apology. You see. *(He shows Lord Medway the book.)*

LORD MEDWAY. Humph!

SIR HARRY. I'm very sorry to leave your lordship alone. But you'll forgive me? *(He goes out without looking at Lady Flutter.)*

LORD MEDWAY *(half aside)*. Leave me alone! 'Twere well if you were going to half as good company as that in which you leave me.

LADY FLUTTER *(turning round)*. What does your lordship say?

LORD MEDWAY. Nothing, ma'am, but that I can excuse Sir Harry's going, as he leaves me in such good company.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, my lord, I am nobody in Sir Harry's opinion. But indeed, at present I should be

but a very dull companion to anyone; so I am sure your lordship will excuse me if I take my leave.

LORD MEDWAY. A quarter of an hour, I hope, ma'am, will not break in too much upon your time.

(Enter Footman.)

FOOTMAN. Sir Harry is gone out in your chair, ma'am; he said you might take the chariot. Will your ladyship please to have it ordered?

LADY FLUTTER. Gone out in my chair?

FOOTMAN. Precisely, my lady.

LADY FLUTTER. See there, my lord, did you ever hear the like? I won't have the chariot—call me a hackney chair.

(Exit Footman.)

Pray, my lord, where is he gone? I saw he showed you his memorandum.

LORD MEDWAY *(intentionally vague)*. Gone? On business of some kind, I think.

LADY FLUTTER. Business? Why, he never had any business in his life. I am sure it is some other engagement.

LORD MEDWAY. Of course it is—what am I thinking of? 'Tis to the play.

LADY FLUTTER. The play? He could not have been in such a hurry for that. 'Tis too early.

LORD MEDWAY. He was to go with a party and to call on some people by the way. That was it.

LADY FLUTTER. I'm sure I don't care what it is. But I thought I heard you say, it were well if he were going to half as good company as that in which he left you.

LORD MEDWAY. And that I should certainly say, ma'am, let him be going to whom he would. But, I must admit it, Sir Harry has a depraved taste.

LADY FLUTTER. I don't doubt but he is going to some of his tavern ladies. Let him go, let him, with all my heart. I don't love him enough to be jealous.

LORD MEDWAY. Why, indeed, Lady Flutter, I can't say Sir Harry is quite so deserving of you as I could wish he were.

LADY FLUTTER. I shan't be long with him, that's one comfort.

LORD MEDWAY. But my dear Lady Flutter, consider how that will appear in the eyes of the world. Here you are but a little while married; what will people think of a separation?

LADY FLUTTER. I'm sure I don't care what they think. I'm not to blame in the matter.

LORD MEDWAY. True, ma'am, the most blame will certainly fall on Sir Harry; and, I confess, he deserves it. But don't you think a *leetle* stroke of censure may possibly glance on you, for not attempting to bear—for a little while longer, at least—with his foolishness? For everybody knows that your prudence is much superior to his, and therefore more will be expected of you.

LADY FLUTTER. My lord, you compliment now.

LORD MEDWAY. Upon my life I don't. I am sure I have said it a thousand times, that I don't know a woman of fashion in town—a handsome one, I mean—with half your talents.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, my lord!

LORD MEDWAY. Upon my word, I am serious. And between ourselves, Sir Harry is thought to be but of very moderate parts, and that it was almost a sacrifice to marry you to him—but I wouldn't say this for the world to anyone but you.

LADY FLUTTER. That's very good of you, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. And so you see, dear Lady Flutter, there are great allowances to be made for such a raw young fellow.

LADY FLUTTER. Yes, yes, very true, my lord, very true.
(*Enter Footman.*)

FOOTMAN. Madam, the chair is ready.

LORD MEDWAY. S'death, blockhead! Must you perpetually intrude?

LADY FLUTTER. Let it wait awhile!
(*Exit Footman.*)

What were you saying, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. I believe I was saying, or at least I was certainly thinking, that you are . . .

LADY FLUTTER. What now?

LORD MEDWAY. A most charming woman.

LADY FLUTTER. Pooh! fiddle faddle . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Indeed, you are.

LADY FLUTTER. Well, that is nothing to the purpose. Tell me, what would you advise me to do with this foolish boy, for I would not have my discretion called in question? I am sure if he had but the sense to talk to me as you have done, he might do just what he pleased with me.

LORD MEDWAY. Amiable creature . . .! Well, whatever you do, don't think of parting from him; for that would only be making mirth for all the spiteful old maids in town, who have already prophesied that miss and master would quarrel before a month was at an end and each run home crying to their respective mammas.

LADY FLUTTER. Do the malicious creatures say that? Well, I'll disappoint them. But what can I do, my lord? He is so intolerably conceited and pert.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, don't pay any attention to him,

and it will wear off by degrees. But, my dear Lady Flutter, are there not other pleasures with which a fine woman could make herself amends for the ill-humour of her husband?

LADY FLUTTER. Not that I know of, my lord. (*Sighs.*)

LORD MEDWAY. I could name you some, if you would give me leave. Oh that Sir Harry and I could change situations, then would the loveliest woman in England also be the happiest. (*He kisses her hand.*)

LADY FLUTTER. Lard, my lord, what's that for?

(*Enter Footman. He coughs discreetly.*)

FOOTMAN. Sir Anthony Branville, madam, comes to wait on your ladyship.

LORD MEDWAY. Damnation!

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, I am glad of that. Show him up.
(*Exit Footman.*)

It will save me the trouble of going to his house this evening.

LORD MEDWAY. Let me beg of you, my dear Lady Flutter, not to mention to your uncle anything that has passed between you and Sir Harry. I'll give you many good reasons for it another time. Have I so much influence over you?

LADY FLUTTER. Well, my lord, to oblige you, I won't.

LORD MEDWAY. Sweet condescending creature!

(*Enter Sir Anthony Branville. He bows very low to both without speaking.*)

LADY FLUTTER. Uncle, your servant.

LORD MEDWAY. Sir Anthony, your most obedient.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, without compliment, I esteem myself extremely happy in the agreeable hope that I see your lordship in perfect health.

LORD MEDWAY. I thank you, Sir Anthony, pretty well, pretty well.

SIR ANTHONY. And you, Niece, I assure you, have a very proper proportion of my unfeigned esteem and good wishes, as likewise hath my worthy nephew, Sir Harry, whom I should have been proud to find in this good company, and deem both myself and him unfortunate in his being absent from it.

LADY FLUTTER. Sir Harry does not think so, I dare swear. (*Half aside.*)

LORD MEDWAY. Hush, hush. . . .

SIR ANTHONY. What does my niece Flutter say?

LADY FLUTTER. Nothing, Uncle.

SIR ANTHONY. Pardon me; I apprehended you had uttered something. Well, my lord, I am next to inquire—though I ought, in point of good breeding, to have done so first—I am next, I say, to inquire how your excellent lady does, and the fair young lady, your daughter?

LORD MEDWAY. Both at your service, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. May I presume to ask the Christian name of the young lady?

LADY FLUTTER. I would not have Lady Medway hear you make so emphatical a distinction, Uncle. Ladies, you know, are always young.

SIR ANTHONY. 'Tis a privilege I know they claim, niece Flutter, but at the same time I imagine 'tis not possible in nature but that the mother must be somewhat older than her daughter.

LORD MEDWAY. Very true. But why do you enquire my daughter's name, Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. Why, my lord, there is a pretty familiar tenderness in sometimes using the *chris-ti-an* name that is truly delightful to a lover; for such, my lord, with all due deference to the lady's high deserts, I wish myself to be considered.

LADY FLUTTER (*aside*). Oh lord, oh lord, my uncle Miss Medway's lover! I shall burst if I stay.

LORD MEDWAY. Louisa, Sir Anthony, is her Christian name, which you are at liberty to use with as much familiar tenderness as you please.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, I have a lively sense of the great honour your lordship does me, and I can assure you, my heart—(*sighs*)—if I can with certainty venture to pronounce about anything which is by its nature so uncertain—my heart, I say, is endeavouring to reassume that liberty, of which it has so long been deprived, for no other purpose than that of offering itself a willing victim to the fair Louisa's charms.

LADY FLUTTER. Very well, Uncle, I see this visit was not at all intended for me; I find you have something to say to my lord, so I won't interrupt you.

SIR ANTHONY. No, no, no, niece Flutter; this visit, I assure you . . .

LADY FLUTTER. Not a word more, Uncle. I'll go and see what the ladies are doing; I fancy they think I am lost.

(*Exit Lady Flutter.*)

LORD MEDWAY. Sir Anthony, I assure you I should think myself very happy in an alliance with a gentleman of your worth.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, you do me honour.

LORD MEDWAY. I have mentioned you to my daughter.

SIR ANTHONY. Mentioned me, my lord! Mentioned me?

LORD MEDWAY. What, wouldn't you have had it so, Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. Conceive me right, Lord Medway; 'tis perfectly agreeable to me to be looked on with a favourable eye by the virtuous young lady, your

daughter; but, my lord, to tell you sincerely—and sincerity, my lord, I hold to be a virtue—my heart is at present in a very fluctuating state.

LORD MEDWAY. I am very sorry, sir, that the thing has been mentioned at all. I understood you were determined?

SIR ANTHONY. Good, my lord, your patience. I am determined, that is to say, my will is determined. But the will and the heart, your lordship knows, are two very different things.

LORD MEDWAY. Sir Anthony, I should be glad we understood each other at once. I apprehended Mrs. Knightly's ill-usage of you had made you give up all thoughts of her; and since you were determined to marry and declared yourself an admirer of my daughter—who is, I must say, as unobjectionable a wife as you could choose—

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, undoubtedly, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. —I was willing to give my consent and thought you appeared as ready to embrace it.

SIR ANTHONY. True, my lord, and so I do still, most cordially.

LORD MEDWAY. Why then, sir, what is your determination, pray?

SIR ANTHONY. Understand me, my lord; this woman—Mrs. Knightly, I mean, for a woman I find she is, though I once thought her an angel—she, I say, has not yet dismissed me in form; and till that is done I think myself bound in honour not to make a tender of my heart or hand elsewhere.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, Sir Anthony, I find you still have a hankering for the widow. You would fain see her again?

SIR ANTHONY. By no means, my lord. I would not

trust my heart with such an interview. No, no, I know the witchcraft of her beauty too well.

LORD MEDWAY. How do you mean to disengage yourself, then?

SIR ANTHONY. My design is to endite an epistle and to request that she will, in full and explicit terms, give me an absolute and final release from all the vows I ever made her.

LORD MEDWAY. I think you are perfectly right, Sir Anthony, and act agreeably to the dictates of true honour. (*Aside*) I won't lose the fool if I can help it.

SIR ANTHONY. I would fain think so, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. I doubt not but that you will get a free discharge from your sovereign lady and mistress.

SIR ANTHONY. 'Tis so to be hoped and presumed, my lord.

(*Mrs. Knightly rushes in. Sir Anthony starts and draws back.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. My lord, I beg your pardon. Your servant told me Lady Flutter was here.

LORD MEDWAY. I am glad he made the mistake, madam, since it has given me the honour of seeing you. Lady Flutter was here but this minute, but she is gone out.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, well, I suppose I must be content with you then, my lord. (*She sees Sir Anthony.*) What! Bless me, Sir Anthony, is it you? I declare I did not see you before. Why, you barbarian, where have you been for this month past? My lord, do you know that Sir Anthony is a lover of mine?

SIR ANTHONY (*advances, bowing gravely*). That Sir Anthony was a lover of yours he has but too fatally experienced.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And an't you so still, you inconstant toad?

SIR ANTHONY. Madam . . .

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Sir Anthony*). Take my advice and make your retreat as fast as you can.

SIR ANTHONY (*aside to Lord Medway*). Impossible, my lord. The magic of her eyes renders me immovable . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. No whispering, gentlemen. Bless me, are you plotting a murder, or is it a rape? I vow, you terrify me!

(*Enter Footman, followed by Creditor.*)

FOOTMAN. The gentleman who came to see you this morning, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Again? What the devil have you come for this time?

CREDITOR. You'll pardon me, my lord, I hope, but I had an idea, or at least my poor wife had an idea. We thought—or rather we wondered—or at least we conceived, that your lordship might consent to stand as godfather to the child we are expecting—any moment now, my lord, any moment.

LORD MEDWAY. I the godfather of your child? But, my good fellow . . .

CREDITOR. Your protection, my lord, would be everything for a poor child like ours. And (*confidentially*) if you would but consent, my lord, I should be happy to take fifty pounds off the account.

LORD MEDWAY. No more. I see there is something in your idea. We will speak of it in private at greater length. (*Turning to the others*) You'll excuse me, I hope; I have some particular business with this gentleman. (*Aside to Mrs. Knightly*) For heaven's sake, ma'am, don't keep your poor lover any longer on the rack of uncertainty and expectation, but dismiss

him fairly at once. (*Aloud*) Sir Anthony, your most obedient. (*To Creditor*) Follow me, sir.

(*They go out.*)

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, I shall beg leave to wish your lordship a good evening. I was just going myself.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Why, sure you wouldn't be such a clown, Sir Anthony, as to leave me by myself. I cannot go, for, thinking Lady Flutter was at home, I sent my chair to pay two or three visits. Now, pri'thee, sit down and say some sprightly thing to me.

SIR ANTHONY. Ah, madam, my sprightly sallies were for happier days. . . .

When Flavia listened to my sighs
And fanned the amorous blaze,
That love which revelled in my eyes
Grew wanton in her praise.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I protest, I did not know you were so good a poet!

SIR ANTHONY. The Muses, madam, are not such niggards of their favours. I have been indulged with some rapturous intercourses with these ladies, I can tell you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh fie, Sir Anthony! What—tell tales? I see I have been justified in my sternness to you. But now let's hear what you can say to me in prose.

SIR ANTHONY. Truly, madam, this unexpected encounter has so disconcerted me that, though I have much to say, I am at a loss where to begin.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, then, don't begin at all, Sir Anthony; for I think you are generally more at a loss how to make an end.

SIR ANTHONY. If you won't hear me, madam . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, well, I will hear you. But

squeeze what you have to say into as small a compass as you can, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY (*clears his throat*). I have courted you, madam, that is, made honourable addresses to you, for the space of six months, during which time you gave me all the encouragement—

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*screams*). Encouragement! Oh, all you powers of chastity defend me. Encouragement, Sir Anthony? Of what nature, pray?

SIR ANTHONY. Your pardon, ma'am—consistently with modesty, I mean.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, I understand you now. Well sir?

SIR ANTHONY. For a time I was favoured with your smiles, when suddenly, to my unutterable astonishment, the sunshine of my hopes vanished.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I only stepped behind a cloud, Sir Anthony, to play at bo-peep with you.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, madam, a total eclipse, I do assure you. My visits were rejected, my letters unanswered, and finally your doors closed against me.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Dear me, did I do all this to poor little Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. You did, madam. Tyrant, you know you did. And now, madam, I would fain know your reasons for such usage.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Reasons—I never gave a reason for anything I did since I was born.

SIR ANTHONY. Then all I have left to desire, or rather to demand—pardon me the expression, madam—is now, from your own lips, to receive my final doom.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Final doom? Why, what are you in such a hurry for? I protest, Sir Anthony, I begin to grow jealous.

SIR ANTHONY. A final answer, madam.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I'll be hanged if I have not got a rival. Oh, faithless man! that have sworn, I don't know how many times, to be true till death—and I, like the rest of my easy sex, to believe you!

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, let me most humbly beseech you . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Begone, dissembling toad. But what else could I expect from such levity as yours?

SIR ANTHONY. Levity, madam, levity? I absolutely disavow the charge. Pray let me implore you, madam, for the last time—observe that, madam—for the last time, to grant me the favour—(*he advances towards her, bowing; she flirts from him and he catches hold of her sleeve*).

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Bless me! Why sure, Sir Anthony, you would not offer to kiss me?

SIR ANTHONY. Oh heavens, madam, kiss you? Madam, let me take the liberty of informing you that, since I could distinguish between virtue and vice, I never took so unwarrantable a freedom with any lady upon the face of the earth.

(*Enter Lady Flutter.*)

LADY FLUTTER. My goodness! what's all this? Mrs. Knightly, my dear, what's the matter?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I protest, my dear, your uncle is so excessively amorous that it is not safe to stay alone with him.

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, madam, I blush for you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Blush for yourself, Sir Anthony, you have most cause.

LADY FLUTTER. What in the name of wonder is it all about?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, Lady Flutter, I am ashamed to tell you his behaviour.

LADY FLUTTER. My uncle's behaviour, madam?

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, I hope my niece Flutter has too good an opinion of the propriety of my conduct upon all occasions to be prejudiced by your uncharitable insinuations. And now, madam, I demand, in the presence of my niece aforesaid, that you will give me a full and formal acquittal of all my vows and promises to you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Listen to that now! He's a rebel in his heart, that's plain, and only wants a pretext to throw me over. But I won't give him that satisfaction.

SIR ANTHONY. Then, madam, since you urge me to it, in one word I here cancel all my vows—

MRS. KNIGHTLY. It is not in your power!

SIR ANTHONY. Renounce your empire, madam . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Toad, I defy you.

SIR ANTHONY. And utterly disclaim your favour.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Stubborn traitor!

SIR ANTHONY. And now, madam, I will withdraw my person and my heart . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Not your heart, Sir Anthony. You can never take that back.

SIR ANTHONY. Both, both, madam, I do aver it to you . . . and will make a tender of them where they will be more honourably and more gratefully entertained. And so, madam, I am, with proper respect, your most obedient—though rejected—humble servant. Niece Flutter, I have the pleasure of wishing you a very good evening.

(Exit Sir Anthony bowing. Both ladies burst out a-laughing.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY *(imitating his manner, looking after him and curtseying very low)*. And I return my unfeigned

acknowledgements for ridding me of your most insipid solemnity, my dear Sir Anthony. La, la, to whom is he going to offer his platonic adorations, do you know, my dear?

LADY FLUTTER. Why, by what I gathered just now from the conversation between my lord and him—for it was a secret to me before—I find Miss Medway is likely to supplant you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Miss Medway to be matched with that old creature? humbly begging your pardon, as he would say, for taking such a liberty with your worthy uncle.

LADY FLUTTER. I am sure nothing but his fortune could have made my lord think of him as a son-in-law.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. But what does Miss Medway think of the matter? She is a sober sort of girl.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, intolerably so; she is perpetually poring over a book or a needle. Yet I don't suppose she can like him. Indeed, I have heard it whispered that she loves my cousin Branville.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. If I thought so, I would keep Sir Anthony dangling this twelvemonth out of mere compassion to the poor girl.

(Enter Sir Harry Flutter.)

SIR HARRY. Mrs. Knightly! my adorable! I kiss your hands!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, Sir Harry, you have missed such an entertainment. Sir Anthony has been here. . . .

SIR HARRY. Well, and what had Uncle Parenthesis to say to you?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, he has abandoned me. I am doomed to wear the willow garland.

SIR HARRY. Oh, you cruel devil you! What, Lady

Flutter? I am amazed to find you here. I thought you had abandoned me and that by this time you had taken post to Oxfordshire to tell papa Sir Harry was such a naughty boy, he would not give it its way in everything. . . . Positively, Mrs. Knightly, when I went out this evening she was going to elope, absolutely bent upon running away from her husband.

LADY FLUTTER. And you see, ma'am, the return he makes me for my good nature in not doing so. After the provocation I received from you, Sir Harry, I think you ought to be grateful to me for changing my mind.

SIR HARRY. My dear, if the changing of your mind be a favour, then I own my obligations to you on that score are innumerable.

LADY FLUTTER. I suppose you think that witty now.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Pray, pray, good people, am I to be left out of the conversation?

SIR HARRY. Oh, ma'am, my Lady Flutter is so extremely quick in her repartees that you will find it very hard to put in a word, I assure you.

LADY FLUTTER. And Sir Harry is so immoderately fond of hearing himself talk that he does not desire either of us to give him any interruption.

SIR HARRY (*bowing to her*). Not your ladyship, I acknowledge.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, I vow, Sir Harry, I should hate you if you were my husband, for all you are such a handsome toad.

SIR HARRY. Indeed, you would not.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Indeed I would.

SIR HARRY. Go, you little hypocrite. . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Get you gone, you rattlepate; what

are these schoolboys coming to? Come, Lady Flutter, will you go with me to the Opera, my dear?

LADY FLUTTER. With all my heart. Anywhere rather than stay at home.

SIR HARRY. You see, ma'am, what a happy man I am in my domestic felicity. But here, Lady Flutter, you must give me leave to interpose a little of my lawful authority; and therefore I desire that you will oblige me with your company at home this evening.

LADY FLUTTER. Indeed, I won't, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Then, madam, I say indeed you shall.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Bless me, Sir Harry, you can't be serious, sure. I am vastly sorry I proposed the thing at all. I won't go to the Opera for my part; I'll stay here and chat with you, if you will give me leave. Or, suppose we had a pool at piquet?

SIR HARRY. By no means, ma'am. Why should you deprive yourself of your entertainment for her childishness. I'll attend you to the Opera myself.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. That you shan't do, Sir Impudence, for I won't go.

SIR HARRY. Indeed you shall, and I'll go with you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I vow you shall neither of you go, and so goodbye to you.

(She runs out.)

LADY FLUTTER. So, Sir Harry, you have exposed yourself prettily.

SIR HARRY. Not in the least, my dear, I have only shown you to advantage.

LADY FLUTTER. It is well that one of us has a little discretion.

SIR HARRY. Meaning your wise self, I suppose? But to show you that I have a small share too, I propose to leave you to your agreeable meditations, and follow

my charming Mrs. Knightly to the Opera. I fancy she'll prefer my company to your ladyship's.

(Exits.)

LADY FLUTTER. Very well, sir. 'If I'm not even with you for this!

(Enter Lord Medway at another door.)

LORD MEDWAY. Alone, madam? What is become of Mrs. Knightly and Sir Anthony?

LADY FLUTTER. Both gone, my lord. My uncle broke away from her, disavowing all allegiance.

LORD MEDWAY. So, so! And what have you done with Lady Medway and my daughter?

LADY FLUTTER. They are at their evening meditations, I suppose.

LORD MEDWAY. You seem ruffled, my dear Lady Flutter. What is the matter?

LADY FLUTTER. Sir Harry . . .

LORD MEDWAY. What, again?

LADY FLUTTER. He has been here since; but so intolerably rude and provoking, positively there's no enduring him any longer. I shall be sorry to leave your lordship's house so soon, but I am determined not to continue under the same roof with Sir Harry.

LORD MEDWAY. Sir Harry deserves all your resentment, I allow, and if your departure were to be a punishment only for him, I should not oppose it. But, my dear Lady Flutter, I could name another whom you would make infinitely more unhappy by your absence.

LADY FLUTTER. Who can that be, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. Suppose I were to name myself!

LADY FLUTTER. You are very obliging, my lord; I have not the least doubt of your friendship.

LORD MEDWAY. Friendship, madam, sometimes

deserves a tenderer name. When a man entertains it for a woman, young and charming as you are, what ought it then to be called?

LADY FLUTTER. Why, friendship, to be sure. What should it be else?

LORD MEDWAY. Shall I tell you?

LADY FLUTTER. No, I won't be told.

LORD MEDWAY. Then you guess . . . ?

LADY FLUTTER. Not I, indeed, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. 'Tis Love, love! Is not that a sweeter sound?

LADY FLUTTER (*sighs*). 'Tis a sound with which I am very little acquainted.

LORD MEDWAY. Then let me be your tutor to teach you a science in which Sir Harry is not worthy to instruct you.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, my lord, if I had met with you before I was married, before you were married—but it is too late now.

LORD MEDWAY. Do not say so. What are marriage ties, if the hearts are not joined? 'Tis that alone which makes the union sacred.

LADY FLUTTER. That is the chief thing, I grant.

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, it is all in all. Take Lady Medway now. She is a good woman, and I esteem her as such. But there is no love between us, so that I consider myself absolutely as a single man. 'Tis just the same with you and Sir Harry. There has indeed been a ceremony between you; but he slights you, and you very justly despise him, so that to all intents and purposes you are a single woman.

LADY FLUTTER. I wish I were, I'm sure, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Why so you are, my dear Lady Flutter, if you would but consider the thing rightly.

If I thought otherwise, I would stab myself to the heart sooner than try to win your affections. . . .

LADY FLUTTER. Indeed, my lord, I believe you.

LORD MEDWAY. Then since we are equally unhappy, what crime can there be in our mutual endeavours to console one another?

LADY FLUTTER. I am sure I don't intend any harm.

LORD MEDWAY. Then why will you talk of leaving me? Sir Harry is too indifferent to be concerned at a separation; the grief, the disappointment will all be mine.

LADY FLUTTER. Indeed, my lord, I should be very sorry to make you uneasy.

LORD MEDWAY. Then speak no more of parting. (*He takes her hand.*) I have a thousand things to tell you; the delightful subject we are upon is inexhaustible; but I can never get you for half an hour to myself. (*Lady Medway comes to the door, but steps back on seeing Lord Medway and Lady Flutter in such familiar conference.*)

LADY FLUTTER. Why, no. Sir Harry is so perpetually whiffing backwards and forwards, one cannot be alone a moment for him.

LORD MEDWAY. I have thought of an expedient which will secure us against all interruption in the future.

LADY FLUTTER. What's that?

LORD MEDWAY. You know Lady Lovegrove, who sat in the box with us at the play the other night—such a virtuous and worthy woman! I am sure she would be glad of your acquaintance. I'll introduce you to her, and there, you know, when you go of an evening to drink tea, I can meet you and we can enjoy an hour's conversation without interruption.

LADY FLUTTER. I protest, that will do very well. But

we must not let Sir Harry know a word of my acquaintance with her, or maybe some evening he'll be for thrusting himself in.

LORD MEDWAY. By no means, he shall never be of our party. But come, madam, I fancy by this time the ladies will have done with their sober studies. We shall be missed unless we go and join them.

LADY FLUTTER. As you will, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Not a word more of parting, remember.

LADY FLUTTER. I'll do what I can to oblige your lordship.

(Exeunt, Lord Medway leading her out. Lady Medway comes out into the middle of the room.)

LADY MEDWAY. Oh, Medway, Medway, this is beyond what I thought you capable of. But I am a fool to be amazed. At my age I ought to have learnt that men are capable of anything!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE I

The Widow Knightly's.

Enter Colonel Medway and Miss Richly.

COLONEL. I would not have mentioned it at all if I had thought it could make so serious an impression upon you.

MISS RICHLY. It ought not, I confess—knowing as I do the truth and generosity of your heart; and yet I cannot help being alarmed—an immense fortune, and a fine woman as my sister really is; though, of course, she *is* rather older than she looks,—the temptation is so great! If it were anyone but you—

COLONEL. Indeed, my dear Clara, these fears of yours reproach as well as flatter me. Is it necessary that I should tell you, over and over again, for the thousandth time, that I can never love any woman but yourself?

MISS RICHLY. I do not need convincing—and yet I own I am pleased to hear you repeat even what you have said a thousand times. But your father's authority—that is what I dread.

COLONEL. Believe me, you have no reason; for though I have ever been observant of my father's will, yet in the particular concerns of my heart, I must remain my own director. This my father knows, and I hope he will urge me no more upon the subject.

MISS RICHLY. But if he should?

COLONEL. Would you have me swear to you?

MISS RICHLY. Oh, not for the world! I am ashamed of doubting, and yet, I don't know how it is, I am full of apprehensions; the truth is, I am not very happy

at home. My sister is grown cold and peevish to me. I never suspected the cause before, but it is now too plain.

COLONEL. Did she ever mention me to you?

MISS RICHLY. Never but in a careless way—and yet I think since your father's last visit to her she has been in better spirits than before, though I am not used one bit the kinder.

COLONEL. You shall not long be subject to her tyranny. My father already knows the secret of my love; and I think that, notwithstanding the article of fortune weighs much with him, his regard for my happiness will even out-balance that.

MISS RICHLY. I wish it may. Bless me! here's my sister.

(Enter Mrs. Knightly: she curtseys gravely to the Colonel.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Why, Clara, I thought you had been alone, and came to chat with you; but I see you are engaged.

COLONEL. I hope my being here, ma'am, will not deprive Miss Richly of the pleasure of your company.

MISS RICHLY. I believe, sister, we shall both think our conversation very much improved by your making a third in it.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I don't know that. A *tête-à-tête* is quite as often disagreeably interrupted as improved by another person.

COLONEL. That, madam, I am sure, can never happen where you make the addition.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I own, Colonel, that I should be sorry if it were the case now; for, to tell you the truth, I have vanity enough to be mortified at the thought of being considered an intruder.

COLONEL. Bless me, madam! You could never be an intruder except, perhaps, on the holy meditations of an anchorite.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Very gallant, colonel, I'm sure. Is this the tenour of the Colonel's conversation with you, Miss Clara?

MISS RICHLY. On the contrary, sister, our talk is always of the most serious character.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Which implies, then, that the Colonel is not serious when he is paying me compliments?

COLONEL. I protest, ma'am, you have quite misinterpreted Miss Richly's remark.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Indeed, I wish I may have, you false dissembler. But it is quite astonishing to me how a man of your vivacity can be entertained by such a piece of still-life as is Clara.

MISS RICHLY. Why, sister, it is not an infallible maxim that we most admire those of our own disposition. I, now, for example, who am naturally grave, do, notwithstanding, admire sprightliness in other people.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Umph, so it seems.

COLONEL. And I, madam, though of a vivacious temperament, do not disrelish an occasional conversation with a serious member of your lovely sex.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, well, there's no accounting for tastes, I suppose. Clara, my child, pray run upstairs and see if I have left my smelling bottle in my dressing-room. If it's not there, it must be somewhere else. There's a good child.

(Clara exit.)

Well, Colonel, I hope you don't mind being thus left to converse with a woman as frivolous as myself. It will be a change, perhaps, after so much seriousness.

COLONEL. Madam, the respect in which I hold you does not permit me to think of you as frivolous.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Tut, tut, Colonel. Believe me, there's a great deal too much respect in this world. Respect is an excellent thing in servants and tradespeople, but in a gentleman, Colonel, in a gentleman it can be carried too far, especially towards the fair sex.

COLONEL. This is a very heterodox opinion, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. It is certainly not an opinion for the vulgar, nor one to be uttered in general mixed company. But it is the private opinion of all women of sense and feeling. It is the respectfulness of the gentlemen which makes life so insupportably tedious for us poor females.

COLONEL. You amaze me, madam.

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*laying her hand on his sleeve*). These, Colonel, are sentiments which I should give voice to only in the intimacy of a feminine conclave. Judge, then, of the confidence I feel in you if I make your ears privy to them.

COLONEL. I am proud and happy to think, ma'am, that you give me the same intimate, yet platonic, place as you allot to your female friends. It is a position beyond which I do not hope or wish to aspire.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. No, no, Colonel; do not imagine that I wish to make a woman or a father confessor of you. I know your temper is too warm, too passionate and impatient to permit you to assume such a rôle. Ha, ha! I like to think of you as a confessor, Colonel. You're such a handsome toad that all the ladies in town would be running to you to disburden themselves of their sins—and perhaps come back with a few new ones on their consciences.

COLONEL. I assure you, ma'am, that where there is

need I can be a St. Anthony, nay, positively a Joseph, in the face of even the most deliciously seducing temptations.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And what if there be no need, you dangerous man?

COLONEL. Ah, then. . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Then what?

COLONEL. Then anything might happen. But it is for me, madam, to judge when the need occurs.

(Mrs. Knightly, who had approached very close, draws away, disappointed.)

Ah, here is Miss Richly returned; I trust she has found your smelling bottle.

MISS RICHLY. Indeed, sister, I cannot find it anyway, and I have hunted high and low.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Foolish child, if you are such a poor searcher, how do you hope to find a husband?

COLONEL. I do not think Miss Richly will have any difficulty in that, ma'am. Her charms, her accomplishments. . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You should rather speak, Colonel, of her lack of fortune, and put no more notions of fairy princes and beggar maids into her head. She is too romantic already. Go, Clara, to the dining-room. I am sure I left my salts there—perhaps they have fallen under the table.

(Exit Clara.)

To dispose of a fortune, Colonel, is our sex's most brilliant accomplishment and the richest of our native charms.

COLONEL. In disparaging your sex, ma'am, you malign your own beauties.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. La, la, la, you are always paying compliments, Colonel. If a woman were to listen to

everything you say, she'd soon think you were making the most amorous advances.

COLONEL. A thousand pardons, ma'am, if my politeness should have seemed offensive. Let me hasten to prove the innocuousness of my seeming advance by (*he bows profoundly*) retiring. Here comes Miss Richly again to keep you company.

MISS RICHLY. They are not to be found in the dining-room, sister.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Tut, tut, here they are in my bag all the time. What a very extraordinary thing. Well, Colonel, since you must be going (*she curtsies*).

(*Colonel bows to both and exits.*)

How long was the Colonel here before I came in, Clara?

MISS RICHLY. Not above a quarter of an hour. Pray, sister, why do you ask?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Because I don't like to see a silly conceited girl getting absurd notions into her head.

MISS RICHLY. Indeed, sister . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, I know, I know, Miss Injured Innocence. But I dare swear, if the Colonel says fine things to you, you believe every word of them.

MISS RICHLY. I assure you, sister, I have as humble an opinion of myself as you or anyone else can have of me.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I am very glad to hear it, child. For I own I think vanity would not be a very desirable companion to your situation.

MISS RICHLY. What have I done, sister, to deserve these severe taunts from you?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What, Miss, do you begin to accuse me of severity? You are an ungrateful girl, and I fancy we shall not continue much longer together.

MISS RICHLY. I see, sister, you are resolved to disapprove of everything I say or do. My company has become irksome to you, and for the present at least, I'll rid you of it.

(Exit Clara.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY *(calling after her as she goes out)*. That's it, flounce away, Miss Tantrums. Was there ever such a child? As soon as a person gives her a word of sound advice, all for her own good, she flies into a rage, and away she goes. Hoity toity, then; go your ways. La, la, la, what are these young people coming to, I wonder?

(Mrs. Knightly rings the bell. Enter Susan.)

SUSAN. Your ladyship's put out about something, I fear.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Yes, I am, Susan—but how do you know it?

SUSAN. I always know what humour you're in, ma'am, by the way you ring the bell. When your ladyship is contented, 'tis the most languishing tinkle; but when you are put out, the bell sounds like a fury and all of us below stairs begin to tremble.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Enough, Susan. I did not send for you to talk about bells.

SUSAN. No, ma'am. *(She curtseys.)*

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Did you know the Colonel was here this morning?

SUSAN. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Then why did you not tell me as soon as he came?

SUSAN. Because he asked to see Miss Richly, ma'am, and not your ladyship.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I do not desire him to see Miss Richly alone. My sister is a young and inexperienced girl, for whose safety I am responsible. I do not wish

that anything untoward should happen to her. And besides, there are other reasons. In future, therefore, please let me know as soon as the Colonel comes to the house.

SUSAN. I will, ma'am.

(A pause.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY *(angrily)*. Why should he prefer that insipid young girl to me, Susan?

SUSAN. I can't conceive, I'm sure. But remember, ma'am, there's more than one man in the world.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, there you're wrong, Susan. At any given moment in a woman's life, there is indeed but one man in the world.

SUSAN. True, ma'am. But fortunately the moments succeed one another very rapidly. So in the long run it comes to the same thing as if there were many men at one moment.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You don't comfort me, Susan. For I'm still living in the moment when the Colonel is the only man.

SUSAN. Well then, ma'am, if you can't catch him, then there's nothing for you to do but hope and pray his moment will soon be passed.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Now you talk like a parson, Susan. Tell me some scandal; I need cheering up.

SUSAN. Well ma'am, the only scandals I know are of the servants' hall, and they would scarcely amuse you, I fear.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Why not? Are not men and women the same whether they're maids and footmen, or ladies and gentlemen?

SUSAN. Oh no, ma'am. Down below stairs we're far more respectable than you above. Our scandal is mortally dull. But if you'd like to hear it all the

same, I'll do the best I can. But it won't be much, I warn you, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Never mind, Susan. Go on.

SUSAN. Have you heard about the new footman at Lord Medway's? He's the talk of all the servants' halls in the neighbourhood. Handsome isn't the word for it, ma'am. Oh, he's a lovely man. He speaks genteel, as though he had been brought up at Oxford, and points his toe and makes a bow as though he had been taught by the best French dancing master. And so mysterious about himself, nobody can get a word out of him to know who he is or where he comes from. Lady Medway's maid, Betty, vows he's a foreign prince, travelling incognito. She's determined to have him and has altogether forgotten her plan to marry my lord's chaplain.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Bless me, I must look at this paragon of footmen next time I go to my lord's.

SUSAN. Oh, I assure you, ma'am, he's worth the trouble of looking at.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, Susan, if I could but think of some one other than the Colonel! That my sister should capture such a fine man! The thought so mortifies me, I can scarcely bear it.

SUSAN. Come, ma'am, don't fret yourself about such a trifle, have patience—

(The door is opened and Lord Medway advances into the room.)

Bless me, here's a visitor.

(Susan makes a hurried exit.)

LORD MEDWAY *(bowing)*. Your most humble slave, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You were the very person, my lord, I was most desirous to see.

LORD MEDWAY. Your words overwhelm me, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Enough, enough, my lord. No more compliments, I beg you. I hope we can speak for a little without perambulations, like persons of sense.

LORD MEDWAY. You always speak, ma'am, not only like a person of sense, but positively like a—

(She flicks her fan at him.)

Tut, tut, I had forgotten there were to be no more compliments. I was about to say you spoke like one of the Nine Muses. But rest assured, ma'am, I didn't mean it.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. La, la, the venomous old toad! But let us talk in earnest, my lord. I was desirous to see you that I might speak of a subject that touches me closely, a subject of the highest and tenderest import to me—I mean your son.

LORD MEDWAY. Strange, ma'am, it was on the same theme that I came to talk to you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, the merits, the virtues of that young man!

LORD MEDWAY. He has indeed a fine leg and passably good features.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. But he remains obdurate. He left me but a few moments ago with as much emotion as though I had been an image of marble, and an indifferent, ugly one at that. And that, too, after I had been making advances to him in a manner that positively bordered on the indecorous!

LORD MEDWAY. Indecorous? Impossible, ma'am! *(He puts his hand over his mouth.)* I had forgot; no compliments.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. It is not for me that he comes so often to my house.

LORD MEDWAY. So I understood from him, when I spoke to him of the matter. Your sister . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, the designing little minx! I warn you, my lord, never trust these seemingly innocent young females: they are always the deepest and slyest of their sex.

LORD MEDWAY. I thank you, ma'am, for the advice.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Meanwhile, what's to be done?

LORD MEDWAY. Abandon the position and leave the young man to meet his fate and your amiable sister.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. That I will never do. Abandon him to that chit of a girl without a struggle? Never! Are you aware, my lord, she is penniless?

LORD MEDWAY. Alas, ma'am, only too well. Believe me, I should regret this match as much or even more than you. But my son seems to be determined.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Is there nothing to be done? Could you not use a father's authority?

LORD MEDWAY. Over the realms of his heart I fear my empire does not extend.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. If you could but persuade him.

LORD MEDWAY. I have done my best, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I should place my fortune unreservedly at his disposal. Could you not repeat your persuasions, reaffirm your parental authority?

LORD MEDWAY. I will try, ma'am, most assuredly. But I doubt the success of any efforts of mine.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Should you have any urgent need of money, my lord . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Alas, ma'am, you have mentioned my chronic complaint.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I should be happy if your efforts on my behalf were crowned with success; I should be happy to—to— You take my meaning, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. Perfectly, ma'am, perfectly. Not another word. I will try a last stroke with my son. With a little judicious play-acting I might appeal to his filial feelings. It is a hazardous venture, but for your sake, ma'am, and also, let me add—for I am a man of frankness—to some extent for my own, I trust it may succeed.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. If it does, my lord, I shall not know how to thank you enough.

LORD MEDWAY. No, no, ma'am, I am sure you will, I am sure you will. (*He kisses her hand.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

Lord Medway's house.

Lady Flutter lying on a sofa polishing her nails.

Enter Lady Medway.

LADY FLUTTER. Good morning to your ladyship.

LADY MEDWAY. I was afraid you were not well, Lady Flutter, you lay a-bed so long this morning.

LADY FLUTTER. I rested ill last night, that was all. Sir Harry as usual. . . . (*Sighs.*)

LADY MEDWAY. I hope I don't interrupt you.

LADY FLUTTER. Not in the least. Your ladyship is extremely obliging to have thought of coming to visit me.

LADY MEDWAY. Where is Sir Harry this morning? I have not seen him yet.

LADY FLUTTER. Don't ask me, Lady Medway; for I know nothing of him.

LADY MEDWAY. What, not of your own husband, my dear?

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, you don't know what I suffer, ma'am. He grows worse and worse every day. There never was such an incorrigible, ill-natured thing in the universe.

LADY MEDWAY. Now, really, there I must differ from you. Sir Harry is not ill-natured. Hasty and petulant, I grant you, he is.

LADY FLUTTER. Madam, I hope you will allow me to be the best judge.

LADY MEDWAY. You have reason to be so, my dear. But a stander-by may also form an opinion.

LADY FLUTTER. I don't know what your ladyship's opinion may be; but I am sure it is the opinion of others—and some that I could name of undoubted good judgement—that there never was a woman so unfortunate in a husband as I am.

LADY MEDWAY. My dear Lady Flutter, we have all said that at one time or other in our lives, and even if it were true in your case, which, believe me, it is not, they are not your friends no more than Sir Harry's who would endeavour to persuade you into such a belief.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, dear ma'am, I know there are some tame wives in the world who can submit in silence to any usage, but I am not one of them, I can assure you. I have not been used to control; nor I won't be controlled, what's more.

LADY MEDWAY. Softly, dear Lady Flutter. Pray speak lower; I would not have any of the servants hear what we are talking of.

LADY FLUTTER. Gracious! Why, every servant in the house knows how we live.

LADY MEDWAY. I am sorry to hear it, ma'am. But don't you think your unguarded complaints without doors and perhaps your unadvised choice of confidants within may lead you into some inconvenience.

LADY FLUTTER. I don't well understand your question, Lady Medway. My choice of confidants within . . . ?

LADY MEDWAY. Yes—male ones, I mean. For example, now, suppose a young married lady should make choice of a gentleman to whom she should open her heart and let him so far into her confidence as to tell him she despises her husband, what do you suppose must be the consequence?

LADY FLUTTER. What? Why, I suppose he'd think—he'd imagine—I don't know what he'd think.

LADY MEDWAY. I'll tell you. He'd think, perhaps, that a liking for him had as great a share in the lady's contempt for her husband as any real fault of the husband himself.

LADY FLUTTER. If he thought so, it would not be my fault, would it now?

LADY MEDWAY. Possibly not, ma'am, but he would think so all the same and feel himself entitled to make an offer of his love to the lady. She perhaps receives it. . . .

LADY FLUTTER. Lord, ma'am! What can she mean?

LADY MEDWAY. If this be the case, what must happen next? Oh, Lady Flutter, an innocent young creature like you should start at the thought.

LADY FLUTTER. Upon my word, Lady Medway, I don't understand such insinuations.

LADY MEDWAY. I am sorry, ma'am, that you should construe a friendly warning into an insult. I am your friend—perhaps the only one who has the power of saving you from destruction.

LADY FLUTTER. Destruction? Madam, I could not have expected this from you in your own house.

LADY MEDWAY. Come, not to play at cross purposes any longer, I must tell you that I am no stranger to my lord's designs on you.

LADY FLUTTER. His designs on me?

LADY MEDWAY. Yes, madam, his cruel, his infamous designs on you.

LADY FLUTTER. This is such extraordinary language, Lady Medway, that really, I don't know what to say to it. I little imagined I should have caused any jealousy when I came into your family.

LADY MEDWAY. Indeed, my dear, you entirely mistake my motive. I own there was a time when I should have felt jealous; but I have outlived it. Pity for your inexperience, regard for your father and your husband's honour have made me take this step. I know my lord makes love to you, and that you have unwarily been drawn in to make an assignation with him.

LADY FLUTTER. If he has been so treacherous as to tell this . . .

LADY MEDWAY. He has not, I assure you. Ah, Lady Flutter, I know too well the nature of his connections with Lady Lovegrove. And now, my dear, if you would escape the snare which is laid for your undoing, be advised by me, who am your true friend.

LADY FLUTTER. I don't believe I have a friend in the world.

LADY MEDWAY. You are wrong, my dear, I am sincerely so. . . .

LADY FLUTTER. Thank you, Lady Medway. I am very unhappy. And my lord was so kind to me.

LADY MEDWAY. You do not know him as I do. My

lord is a man of pleasure and is perhaps less scrupulous in affairs of gallantry than in any other vice. Your youth and beauty attracted him, but when he found you despised your husband and made no difficulty of owning it to him, it almost amounted to an invitation.

LADY FLUTTER. An invitation? Oh, Lady Medway, you surely can't think that.

LADY MEDWAY. To a man of his cast, my dear, it certainly was an invitation. Your unacquaintedness with men of intrigue makes you blind to your danger. What do you think must be the consequence if Sir Harry should discover that you have appointed a private place of meeting with my lord?

LADY FLUTTER. I own I was a fool for consenting; but sure, madam, you won't be so barbarous as to tell Sir Harry? It would give him such an advantage over me, and I cannot bear the thought of it.

LADY MEDWAY. Well, my dear, if I thought I could rely on your honour and discretion in the future, I should certainly keep your secret.

LADY FLUTTER. Madam, I'll quit your house directly, if that will satisfy you.

LADY MEDWAY. By no means, madam. Here you came to town to stay the winter with me, and before a month's elapsed you quit my house. How would you explain that to your friends?

LADY FLUTTER. Why, I can tell them that Sir Harry's so insufferable, I can't live with him any longer.

LADY MEDWAY. Be ruled by me for one week, nay, but for three days, and I'll engage that you and Sir Harry shall be as happy a couple as any in England.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, gracious! you could as soon convert us into angels.

LADY MEDWAY. But will you promise to be guided by me but for a little while?

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, dear Lady Medway, I know you would recommend patience and 'submission and all that; but I never can nor never will submit to his humour.

LADY MEDWAY. Your task is not hard, if you would but set about it. Your husband may be warm and volatile, but he does not want sense, and I am sure he is goodnatured in the main.

LADY FLUTTER. Dear Lady Medway, you are enough to turn one's brain.

LADY MEDWAY. Hear me out, madam. You have as much sense and as much good nature as he. But aren't you a little too quick and impatient of contradiction? Now, if you would but check your impatience I'll answer for it that Sir Harry will follow your lead; for I am sure he loves you a great deal better than my lord does, let him tell you what he pleases.

LADY FLUTTER. I wish I could ever see any proof of it.

LADY MEDWAY. Will you make the experiment?

LADY FLUTTER. What, and give up to him?

LADY MEDWAY. Only for once, just for a trial. If he does not receive it as he ought I'll never desire you to repeat it. But I think I hear his rap at the door.

LADY FLUTTER. Well, ma'am, to show you that it's not my fault if we live so uneasily, I'll do as you would have me. But then, remember you are not to write to my papa or tell Sir Harry anything about... about...

LADY MEDWAY. I will not, and remember you are not to have any private conference with my lord.

LADY FLUTTER. Agreed.

(*Enter Sir Harry Flutter.*)

SIR HARRY (*to Lady Medway*). How does your ladyship this morning? Oh, I am tired to death; I have been at my bankers' and jolting all over the detestable city. Defend me! Why, your hair is dressed so barbarously, Lady Flutter, you look like a fury. Prithee, who gave thee that formidable appearance, child?

LADY FLUTTER. I'm sorry you don't like it, Sir Harry; I'll not employ that Frenchman again.

SIR HARRY. Marvellous complaisance! I suppose, then, you don't like it yourself.

LADY FLUTTER. No, I protest, I think it quite becoming and genteel.

LADY MEDWAY. Then it must be to oblige you, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. Undoubtedly, ma'am, that's ^{her} study.

LADY FLUTTER. Upon my word, Sir Harry, I would make it so if you would let me.

SIR HARRY. My dear, say that over again. It sounds vastly pretty!

LADY FLUTTER. Why, then, seriously, I would rather dress my hair to please you than anybody.

SIR HARRY. Come, come, Lady Flutter, irony is a mighty ticklish weapon and you handle it very awkwardly; lay it by, or you'll cut your fingers.

LADY FLUTTER. But I declare and vow I'm in earnest.

SIR HARRY. Oh, dear madam, you're most obedient—but you're a bungler, take my word for it.

LADY MEDWAY. But, Sir Harry, why should you doubt that Lady Flutter is serious?

SIR HARRY. Why really, ma'am, because I never knew Lady Flutter serious in anything except her endeavours to make herself disagreeable to me.

LADY MEDWAY. In which, I fancy, however, she has not altogether succeeded, Sir Harry.

LADY FLUTTER. If that be the case, then I'm resolved to take another course and try what my endeavours to please him will do.

LADY MEDWAY. What do you say to that, Sir Harry?

SIR HARRY. Say? Gad, I don't well know what to say about it. There is something devilish pleasant in hearing her talk so, if the humour would but last.

LADY MEDWAY. Take my word for it, Sir Harry, it will be your fault if it does not.

LADY FLUTTER. Indeed, indeed, Sir Harry, I will never quarrel with you again.

SIR HARRY. Upon your honour?

LADY FLUTTER. Upon my honour.

SIR HARRY. Nor I with you, upon my soul—And shall we grow fond of one another?

LADY FLUTTER. Immensely.

SIR HARRY. Prodigiously. And I'll never find fault with anything you do.

LADY FLUTTER. Nor I with anything you say.

SIR HARRY. I'll never contradict you.

LADY FLUTTER. Nor I you.

SIR HARRY. Sweet rogue! (*He takes her hand and kisses it.*)

LADY MEDWAY. Well, well, my dear young people, I find I had better be going.)

(*Exit Lady Medway.*)

SIR HARRY. Deuce take me, but I should think you prodigious agreeable if you were always in good humour.

LADY FLUTTER. And upon my life, I believe I should think the same of you.

SIR HARRY. How came we not to discover this sooner?

LADY FLUTTER. Because we never tried to find out.

Lady Medway was the first that put it into my head that we might be happy if we tried.

SIR HARRY. Faith, then, she has more sagacity than my lord; for he was of a contrary opinion and used to pity me.

LADY FLUTTER. For what?

SIR HARRY. For being married to you.

LADY FLUTTER. What?

SIR HARRY. Truth, upon my soul.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh, the false odious old fox! I'll show him who's to be pitied, Sir Harry. (*She throws her arms round his neck.*)

SIR HARRY. Adorable creature! But I shall grow too fond of you. I won't let you be so engaging.

LADY FLUTTER. Oh ho, you can't prevent it.

(*Enter Lord Medway, who stops on seeing Sir Harry.*)

SIR HARRY. Pray, my lord, come in. I have a sad complaint to make to you. This is certainly the most perverse girl . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, Sir Harry, this is the old story. I won't hear what you have to say.

SIR HARRY. But, my lord, this is a new, a brand new affair. She has taken such a resolution.

LORD MEDWAY. Not to part, I hope?

SIR HARRY. No, no, my lord, a much stranger one.

LORD MEDWAY. Ay? What can that be?

SIR HARRY. You will be amazed when I tell you. We were disputing about it when you came in.

LORD MEDWAY. I am sorry, Sir Harry, always to find you in dispute with your lady. I wish from my heart I could compose your differences.

SIR HARRY. Oh, she's the very spirit of contradiction, my lord.

LADY FLUTTER. Depend upon it, Sir Harry, I'll have my own way in this.

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Sir Harry*). And in everything else, I'll be sworn.

SIR HARRY. You shall not.

LADY FLUTTER. I will.

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Lady Flutter*). That's right. Don't give in to him. What's the matter in debate?

SIR HARRY. Why, my lord, 'tis the oddest thing in the world. She is resolved, right or wrong, in spite of all I can say, to be very good and make me love her, whether I will or no. Don't you think that monstrously provoking?

LADY FLUTTER. And he, my lord, has taken up as unaccountable a design—of never contradicting me in anything. Is not that as provoking?

SIR HARRY. Ain't we a couple of fools, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. Why really, Sir Harry, if this could be—of course, I most sincerely wish to see you on good terms; and if you have found out a way—of course, of course, with all my heart.

(*Sir Harry and Lady Flutter burst out a-laughing, and with pretended gravity execute a dance round Lord Medway, who stands looking angry and at the same time absurdly sheepish.*)

I am glad to see you so merry, my young gentry. I wish it may last, that's all. (*Aside to Sir Harry*)

Why, you are undone, man, if you once let her turn matters to ridicule.

SIR HARRY (*aside to Lord Medway*). Oh, my lord, you are quite mistaken; all this is serious.

LADY FLUTTER. Come, I'll have no plotting.

LORD MEDWAY (*aside to Sir Harry*). 'Tis folly, man, she is getting the better of you. Let me speak to her. (*Advances towards Lady Flutter.*) Lady Flutter . . .

LADY FLUTTER. The tables are turned, my lord, I'll whisper with no one but Sir Harry.

LORD MEDWAY (*aside*). But two words. When shall we meet?

LADY FLUTTER. This year, next year, sometime, never. Sir Harry, now that you intend to be very fond of me, I desire that you will grow a little jealous and tell my lord that he must not come into my dressing-room of a morning.

SIR HARRY. Faith, my lord, that's true.

LORD MEDWAY. Mighty fine, mighty fine! This is an extraordinary metamorphosis if it holds—but of that I own I have some doubts.

LADY FLUTTER. You need not fear, my lord. We have your good wishes that it should, I know. (*Curtseys ironically.*) Come, Sir Harry, I want to go to an auction this morning; will you give me your company?

SIR HARRY. With all my heart, my dear. Lord, to think that I should be seen at a public auction with my wife! What are things coming to, I wonder. See here, I received all this to-day. (*He pulls out a purse, which she snatches from him.*) Oh, you little plunderer! Give me a kiss for it. I'll have another.

LADY FLUTTER. Go, you extortioner. Day-day, my lord.

(*They go out romping together.*)

LORD MEDWAY. What can be the meaning of all this? Damned little coquette! So much art at her years—or is it innocence? Why, I am ashamed to be baffled so ridiculously. A man of my experience. And that young puppy, Sir Harry, too. . . .

(*Enter Footman.*)

FOOTMAN. Sir Anthony Brenville's come to wait on your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. Show him up then.

(Exit Footman.)

Was ever a man so egregiously made a fool of? I should suspect my wife's interposition in this if there were the barest possibility of her knowing my designs. Saving young wives from ruin is her favourite pastime. Damn the woman! But I'll think no more about it. I have been defeated, I admit it. 'Tis idle to repine. Ah, here comes my imbecile.

(Enter Sir Anthony.)

Sir Anthony, I am glad to see you. I was in pain for you yesterday when I had to leave you in the magic circle of Mrs. Knightly's charms. I wish you joy of your escape.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, I humbly thank you. There never was, I do assure you, such a siren. But heaven be praised, I am my own man again. And now, my lord, I am come to make a respectful offer of my liberated heart to the truly deserving and fair lady, Louisa.

LORD MEDWAY. Sir Anthony, I have already told you I shall be proud of your alliance, and my daughter, I make no doubt, is as sensible of your worth. Therefore, the shorter we make the wooing, the better. You understand me—women are slippery things.

SIR ANTHONY. Your lordship's insinuation, though derogatory to the fair sex, has, I am apprehensive, a little too much veracity in it. I have found it so to my cost; for would you believe it, my lord, this cruel woman—Mrs. Knightly I mean, begging her pardon for the epithet—is the eighth lady to whom I have made sincere, humble, and passionate advances within the space of these last thirteen years.

LORD MEDWAY. You surprise me, Sir Anthony. You must have been peculiarly unfortunate in the ladies to whom you paid your addresses.

SIR ANTHONY. Supremely so, my lord. For either they absolutely refused to make me happy, or else they were so extremely ungarded in their conduct, even before my face, that I could not, consistently with honour, confer the title of Lady Bransville on any one of them.

LORD MEDWAY. I hope the honour has been reserved by fate for my daughter. She is your ninth mistress, Sir Anthony, and nine, you know, is a propitious number.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, I take the liberty of hoping so too.

LORD MEDWAY. Why then, Sir Anthony, I suppose I may now present you to her in the character of a lover.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, I pant for that felicity.

LORD MEDWAY. I'll call her, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. As your lordship pleases. But, my lord, this Widow Knightly. . . .

LORD MEDWAY. What of her, Sir Anthony?

SIR ANTHONY. I own I loved her better than any of her predecessors; matters, indeed, had gone further between us, for, my lord—not to injure a lady's reputation—I must tell you a secret. I have more than once pressed her hand with these lips.

LORD MEDWAY. Really?

SIR ANTHONY. Fact, upon my veracity. I hope your lordship does not think me vain for telling you.

LORD MEDWAY. By no means, Sir Anthony. But her ill-treatment of you . . .

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, my lord, it has blotted her image from my heart.

LORD MEDWAY. Well, sir, I'll bring my daughter to you, whose image, I hope, will supply hers in your mind.
(*Exit Lord Medway. Sir Anthony walks up and down practising bows, and postures for proposing—laying his hand on his heart, kneeling, etc. Enter Louisa led in by Lord Medway.*)

LORD MEDWAY. Louisa, you are no stranger to Sir Anthony Branville's merits.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, my lord. (*Bows.*)

LORD MEDWAY. That he is a gentleman of family and fortune, of most unblemished honour and very uncommon endowments.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, my good lord, ordinary slight accomplishments.

LORD MEDWAY. You are, therefore, to think yourself happy in being his choice preferably to any other lady. And now, Sir Anthony, I'll leave you to pursue your good fortune.

(*Exit Lord Medway.*)

LOUISA. Sir, won't you please be seated.

SIR ANTHONY. Miss Medway, madam, having obtained your father's permission, I humbly presume to approach you in the delightful hope that, after having convinced you of the excess of my love, I may . . .

LOUISA. I hope you will allow me a reasonable time for this conviction, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, I should hold myself utterly abandoned if I were capable at a first onset of urging a lady on so nice a point.

LOUISA. I thank you, sir; but I could expect no less from a gentleman whom all the world allows to be the very pattern of decorum.

SIR ANTHONY. 'Tis a character, madam, that I have always been ambitious of supporting. . . . Believe me,

madam, I by no means approve of those impetuous lovers who, without regard to the delicacy of the lady, would, as it were, rush at once into her arms—you'll pardon me, madam, for so grossly expressing my idea.

LOUISA. Oh, Sir Anthony, I am charmed with your notions—so refined! so generous! and I must add, though it may appear vain, so correspondent with my own.

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, I am transported to hear you say so, I am at this moment in an absolute ecstasy. Will you permit me, dear madam, the ravishing satisfaction of throwing myself at your feet?

LOUISA. By no means, Sir Anthony. I could not bear to see a gentleman of your dignity in so humble a posture. I will consider it done, if you please.

SIR ANTHONY. I prostrate myself in imagination, I assure you, madam.

LOUISA. I am vastly honoured, Sir Anthony. But my papa is so impatient for the honour of being related to you that I am afraid, unless your prudence interposes, we shall be hurried into wedlock with a precipitancy very inconsistent with our notions of propriety.

SIR ANTHONY. I declare, madam, I am of your ladyship's opinion, and am almost apprehensive of the same thing.

LOUISA. How is this to be avoided, sir?

SIR ANTHONY. Be assured, madam, I too well know what is due to virgin modesty to proceed with an indecorous rapidity. In this particular I have not the honour of agreeing with my lord.

LOUISA. That's very noble of you, Sir Anthony. So passionate and yet so nice! If all lovers were but like you!

SIR ANTHONY. The world, I presume to say, would be the better, madam.

LOUISA. I rely entirely on your discretion, Sir Anthony, to arrange this affair with my papa.

SIR ANTHONY. Oh, madam, I shall convince my lord that it is from very sublime reasons that I submit to postpone my felicity.

LOUISA. I am much obliged to you, Sir Anthony, for this proof of your passionate regard.

SIR ANTHONY. You'll find, madam, that I do not love at the ordinary rate. But I must not indulge myself too long on this tender subject. I doubt it is not safe.

LOUISA (*rising*). Sir, I won't detain you.

SIR ANTHONY. I must absolutely tear myself from you, madam; for gazing on so many charms, I may grow unmindful of the danger.

LOUISA. I will no longer trespass on your time.

SIR ANTHONY. I must fly, madam, lest I should be tempted to transgress those rigid bounds I have prescribed for myself.

LOUISA. Sir, you have my consent to retire.

SIR ANTHONY. I am so overpowered with transport, madam, that I hold it necessary to withdraw.

LOUISA. 'Tis the best way, sir.

SIR ANTHONY. Dear madam, vouchsafe one gracious smile to your adoring slave.

LOUISA. Sir Anthony, your humble servant. (*Smiles and curtseys.*)

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, your most abject. (*Bows.*) Ah, dawning of ecstatic bliss!

(*Exit Sir Anthony. Louisa runs to the other door, opens it stealthily. Footman, who is just outside, almost falls into the room.*)

LOUISA. Ah, Branville. Did you hear our conference?

FOOTMAN. Every word.

(They both burst out laughing.)

We are safe, Louisa. My uncle has given us time, and having time I can do anything.

LOUISA. Safe! Oh, my Branville.

(They embrace. Lord Medway's voice heard off.)

LORD MEDWAY *(off)*. Louisa!

(The two lovers break away. The Footman rushes to the fireplace and begins to fiddle with the ashes.

Enter Lord Medway.)

LORD MEDWAY. Well, my little Louisa *(he is in a good humour, rubbing his hands)*, and did the interview go off well?

LOUISA. Perfectly, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. So, so. And what do you think of your lover now, may I ask?

LOUISA *(exchanging a glance with the Footman)*. Why . . . indeed, my lord . . . I believe I like him very well.

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR

SCENE

In Lord Medway's house.

LORD MEDWAY (*solus*). This is a pretty part for a father to be compelled to play. Lie to his son, work on his affections, simulate unhappiness in order to persuade him to marry a woman for whom he has no liking. Lord! to what shifts am I driven by this accursed poverty of mine! Poor George, he has been the best of sons and this is how I repay him. If I were a hypocrite, I would comfort myself with the reflection that it is all for his own good. But unhappily, nature has made me so sincere that I am incapable of deceiving myself with such false and shallow sophistries. But here he comes. (*He assumes an air of dejection and walks up and down the room as though in meditation.*)

COLONEL. Good morning, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY (*starts as though roused from reverie*).

Good morning, son.

COLONEL. I met Sir Anthony just going to my sister, my lord. I suppose matters are in a favourable train between them?

LORD MEDWAY. He is such an out-of-the-way fellow there is no knowing what to make of him; but I think it will be a match. Your sister has at last condescended to accept of him for a husband.

COLONEL. I am glad of it, my lord, since it was a thing you wished. But still, don't you think, my lord, that Sir Anthony is perhaps a little unsuitable? Their respective ages, to begin with. . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, for God's sake, George, don't talk to me of that subject, I have other more serious matters to think of than this foolish girl's marriage.

COLONEL. Something has ruffled you, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. I have an affair, George, that lies heavy on my spirits. 'Tis in your power and I think . . . I hope, at least, in your inclination . . . to extricate me from the greatest difficulty in which I was ever yet involved.

COLONEL. My lord, you know you may command me, I am ready to hazard my life in your service, if it be anything of that nature. (*He touches the hilt of his sword.*)

LORD MEDWAY. No, no. I am not so old, Medway, as to require the assistance of your sword. You mistake my meaning quite. (*Lord Medway walks up and down again as though agitated. Aside.*) Pest! This is even harder than I thought.

COLONEL. You are moved, my lord. Pray explain yourself.

LORD MEDWAY. Faith, son, I am almost ashamed to tell you the distress I have brought both upon myself and you.

COLONEL. Dear my lord, don't think of me in the matter.

LORD MEDWAY. Last night, George, I lost two thousand pounds which I was obliged to pay this morning, and my honour is engaged for almost as much more.

COLONEL. My lord, I thought you had determined never to venture on such deep play again.

LORD MEDWAY. So I had; but I don't know how, I was drawn in by some of my old friends yesterday evening and they kept me at play almost half the night.

COLONEL. My lord, I am exceedingly concerned, but what can I do?

LORD MEDWAY. Why, there's the point. I am very loath to revive a subject that I know is disagreeable to you; but you see to what distress I am driven. There is but one way left. You remember what we talked of yesterday; if my cursed ill fortune had not pursued me last night I had thought never to have mentioned it to you again.

COLONEL. My lord, I flattered myself you never would.

LORD MEDWAY. I thought I should not have occasion. But this last blow . . . you understand.

COLONEL. Is it not practicable, my lord, to devise some other way?

LORD MEDWAY. Oh, impossible. I am overwhelmed with debts and worried like a stag at bay. But with regard to this last, for which my honour's pawned, I must be speedy in the means of payment.

COLONEL. Indeed, my lord, I am exceedingly shocked by what you tell me.

LORD MEDWAY. And is that all I am to expect from you? Look ye, Medway, it does not become a father to entreat a son your age or the character you bear in life, to be threatened, like a snivelling girl, with parental authority. But as you wish to prosper hereafter, save your father from disgrace, your mother (a good one she has been to you) from penury.

COLONEL. My lord, I call heaven to witness I would give up my life for you both; but you require what is infinitely more precious than life.

LORD MEDWAY. Fie, fie upon it! How like a woman this is! These fine speeches are in the vein of your sister, a silly romantic girl. I expected a more substantial proof of filial love from you.

COLONEL. My lord, you wound me deeply by such a cruel charge. What have I not already done to show my love for you, my lord? Have I not given up my birthright? Put it wholly in your power to alienate for ever, if you please, my family inheritance and leave me a beggar? Is not this a substantial proof? My lord, I beg your pardon, but you have wrung my very heart.

LORD MEDWAY (*aside*). Must I act out my part? 'Tis too ignominious. (*Aloud*) You have wrung mine too . . . for, Medway, you speak truth; I have made you a beggar. I have mortgaged the last foot of land I possessed in the world, and the only prospect I had of redeeming it was by this lady's fortune. I thought a boyish passion might have been overcome when your own interest and the honour of your family were at stake.

COLONEL. As for my own interest, my lord, it is but a feather in the scale; and for the rest, I think my own honour is more concerned in this event than that of my family can possibly be.

LORD MEDWAY. You told me you were not engaged by promise to the lady.

COLONEL. I am not, my lord, but are there no ties but what the law can vindicate? Oh, my lord, you forget the lessons you have given me on other occasions.

LORD MEDWAY. Enough, son, enough. I acknowledge the justness of your reproach. I have done . . . I give up the cause. Had this affair on which I had set my heart succeeded, I should have been happier than I desire to be . . . I had this morning been laying down a plan . . . but no matter, it is all over . . . I am sorry your mother should be a sufferer with me. I have not been the kindest husband. But I did intend, after I

had seen you and my daughter settled, to have retired into the country on a moderate annuity; and there, Medway, I might have led a very different life from what you have been used to see. 'But I must struggle with ill fortune as best I can. . . . You have been a worthy son, I acknowledge it. You have done enough. You shall not charge me with making you miserable for life.

COLONEL. Oh, my lord, I wish you had kept up your resentment. I cannot bear to hear you talk in this strain.

LORD MEDWAY. Why not, man? 'Tis nothing but the truth.

COLONEL. My lord, I would do anything to prevent . . .

LORD MEDWAY. What? Speak, George.

COLONEL. I can't, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. A father's ruin, you would say. I know the tenderness of your nature, Medway, and therefore shall not urge you; your father is not such a tyrant. I have always considered you as my friend.

COLONEL. My lord, to deserve that title still, I cannot stand by and see you unhappy.

LORD MEDWAY. Not a word more, George.

COLONEL. I'll give up all, even my love, to save you.

LORD MEDWAY. You cannot mean it?

COLONEL. I'll do as you would have me.

LORD MEDWAY. What, marry Mrs. Knightly?

COLONEL. I will, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Give me your hand. Oh, George . . . you make me ashamed. (*He breaks away.*)

COLONEL. My lord, since your affairs are urgent, I will not trust to the wavering of my own heart. I will visit the lady this very day. But I must first apprise my poor Clara of this sudden change.

LORD MEDWAY. By all means, George. Remember, broken hearts are soon healed. When you are married you may have it in your power to make her amends for the fortune she has lost.

COLONEL. Oh, my lord, you little know my Clara. Riches can never heal the wound my faithlessness will inflict. But I cannot trust myself to think upon the subject. If she lives and can forget me, 'tis all I dare to hope. *(Exit.)*

LORD MEDWAY *(solus. He mops his brow with his handkerchief)*. Thank God, that ordeal is over. Poor George, how infamously I have used him. I can only hope that the widow will make him happier than he expects . . . than I expect. *(He walks up and down.)* Lord, lord, what a life . . . what a life!

(The Creditor tip-toes furtively into the room.)

CREDITOR. My lord . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Ha, who's that? You? What do you want now?

CREDITOR. Oh, nothing, my lord . . . or at least almost nothing. But since your lordship was so kind and condescending as to say you would stand godfather to our fourth, I thought, or rather my poor wife thought, that your lordship would allow us to have a little paragraph about the christening put into the *Gentleman's Magazine*, mentioning your lordship's name as the godfather.

LORD MEDWAY. What do you say, sirrah?

CREDITOR. Oh, I should be happy if you consent, my lord, to remit another twenty-five pounds off the account.

LORD MEDWAY. Impudent rogue, you dare to propose that I should cheapen my name for a paltry consideration like twenty-five pounds?

CREDITOR. Oh, my lord, my lord, I didn't mean to offend your lordship.

LORD MEDWAY. I have been too condescending already, and you forget to whom you are talking. But have a care, fellow, or, by God, I will not only refuse to stand godfather to your brat, but will keep you another three years for your money.

CREDITOR. Oh, my lord, forgive me. I swear to you I meant no harm.

LORD MEDWAY. Leave me at once, sir, or I shall begin to grow angry.

CREDITOR. Oh, your lordship, your lordship . . .
(*As he goes out, he almost collides with Mrs. Knightly, who is coming in.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Look where you're going, you clumsy fellow.

CREDITOR (*unconscious of her presence*). Your lordship, your lordship. . . . (Exit.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, my dear lord, I know you will be astonished by the earliness of this visit. Positively, you know, I was dressed by ten this morning.

LORD MEDWAY. You amaze me, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I couldn't rest, my lord, until I had seen you to learn if your stony-hearted son has at all relented towards me.

LORD MEDWAY. I have this moment been speaking to him.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And what did he say, the dear delightful toad?

LORD MEDWAY. He still loves your sister, it seems.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I knew it, I knew it. The thought that I should be scorned for the sake of that miserable puling child makes my blood boil. She has no features, no charms of form. Pho, a mere stick of barley sugar

in petticoats. And I am disregarded for that. Look at me, my lord, look, I ask you: do I deserve this treatment? It is an insupportable insult.

LORD MEDWAY. Calm yourself, ma'am. I have not yet finished what I had to say. It is true my son feels affection for your sister.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Again! You delight to turn the dagger in the wound.

LORD MEDWAY. But . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, blessed word! But—continue, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. I have induced him, not without the greatest difficulty, to see reason in the matter.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You mean, my lord . . .?

LORD MEDWAY. I mean that Medway has proved himself ready, like a good son, to sacrifice a boyish and romantic passion for the sake of the honour of his family. You will soon hear as much from his own lips; for he is to pay his respects to you to-day.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. My dear lord, you are a worker of miracles. Medway is mine, then. What though he love my sister now? I shall count myself the most despicable of women if he has not, within a month of our wedding day, wholly forgotten her in my arms. But what means did you use to persuade him?

LORD MEDWAY. The most unscrupulous deception, ma'am, of which I was so heartily ashamed when I had succeeded that I was on the point of calling him back to undeceive him.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Fie, fie, my lord, you are become very moral all of a sudden. Make your conscience easy; for you may rest assured that I shall make your son the happiest of men. The end justifies the means, you know.

LORD MEDWAY. I hope it may. But, meanwhile, I cannot but feel uneasy when I think that I may have ruined my son's happiness for ever. If I were a rich man I could have afforded to be virtuous and to allow my son to be happy in his own way.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You are too gloomy, my lord; your son will be happy, and, when your fortune is restored, you can be as virtuous as you please.

LORD MEDWAY. You pay me with my own coin, ma'am. But there are times in life when one begins to wonder whether the old superstitions and the old moral precepts are not, after all, the best guides.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, now, my lord, you are beginning to talk religion, and you know it's a subject I do not tolerate. Religion and morality are all very well in church on Sundays, but I cannot allow the sanctities of private life to be violated by them. Let us talk of something more cheerful. For what date shall we fix the wedding?

LORD MEDWAY (*laughs*). I see you are a philosopher, ma'am, and I will try not to be outdone by you. I will look at things cheerfully and reasonably again.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. There I recognize my dear Lord Medway once more.

LORD MEDWAY. The wedding, did you say? Let it be as soon as you will.

(*Enter Footman, and stands at the door waiting to be noticed.*)

Let it be next week if you will.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. With all my heart, my lord. In these matters I do not like delay. Let me become Mrs. Medway and your daughter next week.

LORD MEDWAY. So be it.

(*Footman coughs.*)

(*Looking up.*) Ha, sirrah, what do you want? Don't stand there gaping.

FOOTMAN. The gentleman who was speaking with you a moment since has come back, my lord, and vows he won't leave the house till he has seen your lordship again.

LORD MEDWAY (*to Mrs. Knightly*). You'll pardon me, ma'am. 'Tis this infernal tailor of mine. A creditor, you know; one must be civil to the rogues. And besides, I have a notion if I go now I shall be able to make him take a hundred guineas off the bill.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Faith, my lord, you must have a very cunning way with creditors to make them bate their claims like this.

LORD MEDWAY. I flatter myself I have, ma'am.

(*Lord Medway bows and exit. The Footman puts more wood on the fire; Mrs. Knightly looks at him through her lorgnon and seems agreeably surprised by his appearance.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You are but newly entered his lordship's service, are you not?

FOOTMAN. Yes, ma'am, I have been in the house but a few days.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What is your name?

FOOTMAN. My name, ma'am, is James. That, at least, is what my godfathers and godmothers called me. But his lordship has thought fit to rebaptize me, and here I am called John.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, John, I shall call you James, because it is your real name.

FOOTMAN. I'm sure I'm greatly obliged, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You speak in a very genteel manner, James.

FOOTMAN. Indeed, ma'am? My parents brought me

up somewhat above my station, and besides, I have been in some very good places, where I learnt to copy the speech of my masters.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. The maids tell me they think you are a foreign prince travelling incognito, James.

FOOTMAN. They are very pleasant, I'm sure, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And I protest, James, I don't believe they are so far wrong neither. Such an air, such manners could never belong to a common footman.

They say, too, you're very mysterious about yourself.

FOOTMAN. Oh, ma'am, I am but discreet.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Discreet? Ah, that's a virtue which I, for one, particularly prize in a man, especially when he's young and handsome. Tell me, James, how old are you?

FOOTMAN. Twenty-four last Michaelmas, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And a very good age too.

FOOTMAN. Thank you, ma'am; it's very kind of you to say so, I'm sure.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You look strong.

FOOTMAN. Oh, I am strong, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And willing?

FOOTMAN. I hope so, ma'am.

(A pause.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Tell me, James, do you pad your calves?

FOOTMAN. Oh, no, ma'am; my legs are all my own.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. H'm, I'm glad of that, for I should be sorry to see a footman with so much vanity as to pad his calves. Do you like your place here with his lordship?

FOOTMAN. Very well indeed, I thank you, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You wouldn't like to change it for another?

FOOTMAN. Not at all, ma'am, I am very well contented here.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ho, ho! I suppose you have found a sweetheart in the house. One of the maids is partial to you, eh James?

FOOTMAN. Well, ma'am

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, I'm not surprised. We women are all alike, and if I were in her place I should do the same. There's no resisting a handsome face and a fine figure. Has she granted you her favours yet, James?

FOOTMAN. Indeed, ma'am, I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Come, James, don't try to play the pretty innocent. It is a part that does not suit you. But tell me now, what would you do suppose a lady were to take a fancy to you . . . a person of quality like myself, for example?

FOOTMAN. What should I do, ma'am? I'm sure I don't know, ma'am. But you may be sure I should always know my place.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Know your place, h'm. But perhaps the lady might have different views as to what your place was.

FOOTMAN. Perhaps, ma'am. But I'm sure I don't know. Would you excuse me, ma'am, I must get on with my work and fill this scuttle.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Very well, James, go your ways. Wait, here's a guinea for you, James.

FOOTMAN. A guin——. (*He is astonished and horrified, but then remembering his flunkey's part, pockets the coin.*) Thank you kindly, ma'am.
(*Exit Footman.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*sola*). Alas, my poor susceptible

heart. What a form, what manly grace, what captivating music in his voice. Beside this Adonis, Medway is a poor, inconsiderable fellow. But a footman, heaven preserve me, a footman! Even tho' he be a prince in disguise! I dare not. The scandal . . . the envenomed malice of the world. No, I must not. But his face . . . the gentility of his manners . . . and what a leg! No padding either. Was ever a woman so unfortunate? Medway . . . pooh! Clara may have him if she will. I was foolish to be so jealous of her capture. But a footman! No, no. But perhaps if . . . supposing . . . in secret . . . no, yes, no . . . oh, my poor head's in a whirl. (*She drops into a chair and fans herself with agitated rapidity.*)

(*Enter Louisa.*)

LOUISA. Good morning, Mrs. Knightly.

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*starts*). Ah! . . . Oh, it's only you, Louisa.

LOUISA. My mamma, hearing you were come, sent me down to beg you will honour her by a visit to her room.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Certainly, child, with the greatest pleasure in the world. Tell me, child, hasn't your papa engaged a new footman of late?

LOUISA (*taken aback*). Er—I—er—I do seem to have noticed a new servant in these last few days.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. His lordship knows where to find very fine young fellows for his service.

LOUISA. I have not observed him closely, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Myself, I always find it very difficult to get good servants. This fellow is extremely genteel and neat. Being at the moment greatly in need of a footman, I shall ask your dear papa to cede him to me. He has been here but a short while, and

your father will scarce miss him. May I ask you, Louisa, to bring your influence to bear in support of my request.

LOUISA. Me, ma'am?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Why so astonished, child?

LOUISA. Oh, nothing, ma'am . . . not at all. But have you spoken to—er—to the man himself?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Oh, I don't allow grass to grow under my feet. I have been talking to the man this last quarter of an hour and he is all willingness to come, if his master will let him.

LOUISA. He said he would go?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. He positively jumped at the suggestion. And now, my dear, I must run upstairs to your dear mamma. And how is Lady Flutter this morning? You are not coming with me?

LOUISA. No, if you'll excuse me, ma'am, I have a little business I must attend to here first. I'll follow you directly to my mother's.

(Exit Mrs. Knightly.)

(Louisa goes to the fireplace and rings the bell violently. The Footman appears.)

FOOTMAN *(looking furtively round the room to make sure nobody is there)*. Louisa! What happiness to find you alone. *(He approaches her, but she turns her back on him, and leaning her elbow on the mantelpiece, begins to cry.)* Louisa!

LOUISA. Go away, you faithless, inconstant monster.

FOOTMAN. Dearest Louisa . . . Oh, am I mad? Is the world unhinged? Tell me, what is the meaning of this outburst?

LOUISA. With what affected innocence you ask? Was it necessary to insinuate yourself into the house, to simulate the transports of a pure and ardent passion,

and then to deceive me so grossly, so callously? Oh, Branville, Branville, I should never have thought it of you!

FOOTMAN. But I am utterly at a loss to know what you mean, Louisa.

LOUISA. Prevarication is useless. I know all.

FOOTMAN. Know all what?

LOUISA. My information is certain and unequivocal. It comes from the hated rival for whom you are deceiving me.

FOOTMAN. I remain as much in the dark as ever. Will you not speak plainly and not in parables?

LOUISA. What brazen impudence! Very well, sir, if you desire the matter to be expressed plainly and without circumlocution I will tell you. Mrs. Knightly . . .

FOOTMAN. Mrs. Knightly?

LOUISA. Ah, you start guiltily at the name. Mrs. Knightly has told me all.

FOOTMAN. She has confessed to you the tenour of the conversation she held with me?

LOUISA. She has. What have you to say now?

FOOTMAN. That I am amazed any woman should have the effrontery first to make the most open advances to one who can only seem to her to be a servant, and second to make an innocent and lovely girl the recipient of so ignoble a secret.

LOUISA. What, did she make advances to you?

FOOTMAN. Most certainly and in scarcely veiled terms.

LOUISA. This does not tally with her account of the matter. She told me that, being in want of a footman, she had asked if you would enter her service, and that you had willingly, almost eagerly, consented. And she asked me to second her request to my father that he would let you go.

FOOTMAN. But this is infamous. Louisa, do you believe her, can you doubt me? By all that's holy I swear. . . .

LOUISA. No, no. I believe you, Branville. Oh, I am so thankful to believe you. I would believe you even if I thought you were not speaking the truth. For I want to believe that you love me.

FOOTMAN (*embracing her*). My Louisa. . . .

LOUISA. But what will you do to protect yourself against that odious woman? What will you do if my father sends you to her, as though you were a slave or an inanimate thing to be made a present of?

FOOTMAN. Have patience, Louisa. It may be that I shall be able to use this woman's infatuation to gain our happiness.

LOUISA. What? You dare to tell me you will encourage my rival?

FOOTMAN. Hush, hush, Louisa. She is not your rival. Do not honour her with so flattering a title. All that I ask is that you should trust me, I seem to see a ray of hope in this strange situation. Will you trust me? Or have you no confidence in the lover who adores you?

LOUISA. Oh, Branville, Branville, do what you will. I trust you implicitly. Only, I beg you, be careful; do not allow yourself to be dazzled by her charms and the glitter of so much wealth. I am only a poor ugly little girl, and she is in her ripest beauty. But I do trust you, I do, I do. . . .

FOOTMAN. If only we could declare our love to all the world; all would be perfect happiness then.

LOUISA. If only.

(*There is a silence, they remain embraced.*)

FOOTMAN. Do you remember, Louisa, how in the old

days when I was still Branville, a guest and not a menial in your father's house, do you remember how you used sometimes to sing to me, sitting there at the harpsichord? With what raptures I listened! Music was made more enchanting, because it was your voice that sang. Sing to me now, Louisa, it is so long since I heard you.

LOUISA. How happy I am to do anything that gives you pleasure!

(She goes to the harpsichord, plays and sings. The Footman stands by, listening ecstatically.)

(Enter Lord Medway.)

LORD MEDWAY. Where is Mrs. Knightly, Louisa? I left her here a little while ago.

(The Footman, who has been bending over the harpsichord, straightens himself up and begins noisily to draw the curtains.)

CURTAIN

ACT FIVE

SCENE ONE

*Mrs. Knightly's house. Miss Richly sitting reading.
Enter Colonel Medway, very distraught.*

MISS RICHLY. Ah, Colonel. This is an unexpected pleasure. But, bless me, what's the matter? You're not ill?

COLONEL. Not ill, Clara, but sick at heart—Oh, unhappy, miserable, ashamed, as I have never been before.

MISS RICHLY. You alarm me, sir. Tell me, I beg you, the reason of this sudden change of spirits.

COLONEL. How can I, how can I? But I must. Within this hour, Clara, the faithless despicable man who called himself your lover will supplicate your sister for her hand.

MISS RICHLY. Medway!

COLONEL. Hate me, despise me; I deserve it.

MISS RICHLY. I can only love you, Medway. It is you, it seems, who hate and despise me.

COLONEL. Clara, Clara, I beg you not to say such things. My heart is wholly yours, never, never to be recalled from you, even though—even though—

MISS RICHLY. Even though you are to marry my sister.

Oh, Medway, there must be a reason, an explanation.

COLONEL. Can the generosity of your heart admit it as an excuse for my leaving you, that it is to save from utter and immediate ruin a father that I dearly love?

MISS RICHLY. It can, Medway, and I honour you for the motive.

COLONEL. Oh, Clara, why did I consent to give you up? What have I got to compensate your loss?

MISS RICHLY. You have the consciousness of having done right. You have broken no oaths, no promises to me. Nay, I have often told you I would never be yours without your father's consent. For, sunk as I am in fortune, I would not meanly creep into a family that rejected me. And for this reason I would neither give nor receive a vow; but left you free to make a better choice where your duty or your interest should urge you.

COLONEL. That last word, Clara, carries a reproach in it, which I cannot bear from you.

MISS RICHLY. Do not mistake me, Medway, I know that interest had not the smallest share in this action. I wish it had—for then I could part from you with less anguish than now, I own, I have power to do. But no more, no more on this theme. My sister loves you and I hope will make you happy.

COLONEL. Happy, do you say? No, Clara, no, happiness and I have parted company; what I have done to-day has made a wretch of me for life.

MISS RICHLY. Oh, Medway, show more indifference if you would not have me repine too much at my own sad fate.

COLONEL. And what is mine then, Clara—condemned to losing what I love more dearly than life, condemned to pass my days with one I cannot love. Your condition is not so wretched: you are still free, and time may incline you to bestow your heart on some happier man than I.

MISS RICHLY. Never, never!

COLONEL. Do not say so. I had but that hope left to keep me from desperation; if I lose it, I shall forget all obligations and give my father up to poverty and shame.

MISS RICHLY. No more, I beseech you. Do not repent of a good and noble action.

COLONEL. Clara, the tears stand trembling in your eyes while you speak. Give them vent, for I am ashamed to weep alone. (*He turns away from her.*)

MISS RICHLY. See, mine are gone already; collect yourself, I beg you, Medway. You have a noble and a difficult part to play.

COLONEL. Oh, Clara, I am unequal to the task. I have no fortitude left.

MISS RICHLY. Hush, here is my sister.

(*Enter Mrs. Knightly, talking to Susan. She does not see the other two for a moment.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Did you deliver my note at Lord Medway's house?

MAID. Yes, ma'am, to the new footman, as you directed. He will be here, he said, within these few minutes.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You delivered it into his own hands?

MAID. Trust me for that, ma'am. Oh, the handsomest young fellow in the world, I vow. Betty was right when she called him a prince.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Enough, girl, enough. Tell the other servants I am not to be disturbed till I ring.

MAID. Yes, ma'am. (*Curtseys and exit.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, my poor heart. (*Perceiving the others.*) What, the Colonel here? Could anything be more unlucky! (*Aloud*) Colonel Medway?

COLONEL. Your most obedient, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I see you are continuing your serious conversation with my sister.

MISS RICHLY. But I was this moment leaving the Colonel, who has, he tells me, something of import to

say to you in private. (*Aside to Colonel Medway*) Courage, Medway, it is your duty. Think of your unhappy father.

COLONEL (*aside*). My unhappy father! (*To Mrs. Knightly*) Madam . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Tush, Clara, don't run away like this. The Colonel and I have no secrets. Besides, I am too frivolous for his taste, and I know he prefers your more sober conversation. Don't you, Colonel?

COLONEL (*confused*). On the contrary, ma'am . . . at the moment. . . . If you have a few minutes' leisure . . .

MISS RICHLY. Indeed, sister, I know the Colonel is extremely desirous of having a few words with you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. La, la, la, how solemn we all are! Of course, if the Colonel must speak with me, he must. These military gentlemen have to be obeyed. But he shall do it some other time, for I am busy now. Go, Clara, take the Colonel with you to the morning-room. There you may talk to him as seriously as you please, and I vow the Colonel will prefer that conversation to any he is likely to have with me here.

COLONEL (*very determined to do his duty*). But, madam.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Not a word more, Colonel. Clara, lead him away.

MISS RICHLY. I will, sister. (*Aside to Colonel*) This is most extraordinary.

COLONEL. I feel like a condemned man reprieved at the foot of the gallows. But for how long, alas, how long?
(*Exeunt Clara and the Colonel.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*sola*). At last! How did I ever come to be infatuated with such a man? Sure, it was only

jealousy of Clara drove me to fancy I was. But when will James be here? (*Looks at herself in the glass.*) Mercy on me, how badly I am rouged! (*Repaints herself.*) What a man! I am sure his father must have been a gentleman. Some little amour with a country girl or my lady's chambermaid—and the fruit of it was James. He has all the marks of breeding. (*Standing back from the glass.*) Come, that's better. How shall I receive him? Shall I stand thus? No, the posture is too forbidding—or walk about the room? No, 'twere better, I think, to recline.

(*Enter Maid.*)

MAID. Mr. John is come, ma'am, from Lord Medway's.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Send him up to me in a minute's time, Eliza, and tell the porter to admit nobody, whoever it may be.

MAID. I will, ma'am.

(*Exit Maid. Mrs. Knightly arranges herself with art on the sofa. Enter Footman.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Is that you, James?

FOOTMAN. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I can't see you there, you foolish fellow. Come and take a seat beside me here.

FOOTMAN. Oh no, ma'am. I couldn't dream of such a thing. I know my place too well.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Now, James, I shall be angry if you talk to me about your place any more. Come and sit here, when I tell you.

FOOTMAN. Very well, ma'am. (*He sits on the chair indicated.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*after a long silence*). Well, James, you don't say anything.

FOOTMAN. No, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Weren't you surprised to get my letter?

FOOTMAN. Oh, no, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What, not surprised?

FOOTMAN. Not at all, ma'am. My dear mother brought me up never to be surprised at anything that the gentry might do.

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*taken aback*). H'm, I see. (*Another pause.*)

(*Mrs. Knightly tries again on a different tone.*)

James, do you understand the workings of a woman's heart?

FOOTMAN. Oh yes, ma'am, perfectly.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I have laid mine bare to you, James; I have had the courage to expose its weakness and its passion to your eyes.

FOOTMAN. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I have thrown aside the modesty becoming to my sex.

FOOTMAN. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I have dared to flout the laws of civil society in order to tell you, James, that your virtues and your manly beauty—I blush to have to make this soft confession—have altogether captivated my heart.

FOOTMAN. Yes, ma'am!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ungrateful man, is this all you have to say?

FOOTMAN. Well, ma'am, I'm sure I don't know what else I ought to say in the circumstances.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. But does my ardour evoke no answering spark in your bosom?

FOOTMAN. Oh no, ma'am. I know my place too well for that.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Silence! Can you think of nothing but your place? There is no question of place here. You are a man and I am a woman; that is all. Do you understand me, James?

FOOTMAN. I see, ma'am. But I understood from what I happened to overhear of your conversation with his lordship this morning that you were to marry my young master, the Colonel.

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*aside*). Jealous! A happy sign. (*Aloud*) Think no more of that, James. I had not seen you then. 'Twas but a passing infatuation, the object of which was so unwilling that I was forced to scheme with his father in order to force him to make a declaration to me. It is my sister he loves. Let her have him, I say. I care not now. Think no more of it, I beg you, James.

FOOTMAN. No, ma'am, I certainly won't. (*A silence.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*coolly*). Tell me, James, weren't you a little bit jealous?

FOOTMAN. Not in the least, I assure you, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY (*bursting out*). This is insufferable. What's come over the men nowadays?

FOOTMAN. I'm sure I don't know, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Are you a lifeless block of wood? A stone? A cold-blooded fish? Sure, you can't be a man. What are you? Tell me!

FOOTMAN (*rising to his feet and adopting the grand seigneur manner of young Branville*). Madam, since you do me the honour to ask who and what I am, I shall obey as succinctly as I can. My name is James Branville.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Branville?

FOOTMAN. Precisely, madam. It is some years since I last had the pleasure of kissing your hand. In all

probability, ma'am, you have wholly forgotten the ungainly schoolboy whom Sir Anthony brought one day to see you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Young Branville, and in this disguise? But you were travelling on the Continent.

FOOTMAN. I was, ma'am. But the passion for Miss Louisa, which I have cherished since boyhood, brought me back prematurely and in secret. To be near her I have assumed this menial rôle.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. This is all extremely romantic.

FOOTMAN. Possibly, ma'am, but not so romantic as your own attempts to seduce his lordship's footman.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Come, come, Mr. Branville, you'll forget that little episode, I hope. Let bygones be bygones is my motto.

FOOTMAN. Unfortunately, ma'am, this is an incident which it will be impossible for me to overlook completely.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What do you mean, sir?

FOOTMAN. Impossible, ma'am, unless . . . unless . . .

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What, do you dare to threaten me?

FOOTMAN. Frankly, madam, that is precisely what I am doing.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Pooh, I defy you, I care that for your threats. (*Snaps her fingers.*)

FOOTMAN. In that case, madam, I shall feel compelled—you understand with what infinite regrets—to make public the letter which you were so unwise as to send to Lord Medway's footman this afternoon. The tone of that letter is—how shall I put it?—unequivocally warm.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. That's all very well, young sir, but what will Lord Medway say, when he hears his

daughter's lover has been masquerading as a footman in his own house?

FOOTMAN. I venture to believe, ma'am, that he will say nothing, if he thought the Colonel was likely to be apprised of the little trick by which he was to be induced to make an offer of marriage to you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. H'm, Mr. Branville, I see you are a young man of resource.

FOOTMAN. Coming from you, ma'am, the compliment is doubly flattering.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You seem to have us on the horns of your little dilemma, and I can see no way out but between. What are your terms, sir?

FOOTMAN. Madam, you speak with a directness which does you credit, and I cannot do better than to imitate you. What I ask of you is so easy for you to comply with and so reasonable in itself, that I hope you may forget the compulsion I have been forced to put upon you and come at last to do of your own free will what I have begun by extorting.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. This is a very pious hope, Mr. Branville. But perhaps you will be good enough to cut short the rest of your sermon and come down to business.

FOOTMAN. Certainly, ma'am. As you already know, I love and am beloved by Louisa. I desire to make her my wife, but what hope have I of being favourably received by Lord Medway when my sole fortune consists in expectations from my uncle?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. This same uncle is now proposing himself as a husband for Louisa, and you would have me help you, not only to give up his prospective bride, but also a part of his fortune to you. Is that all?

FOOTMAN. You have hit the mark unerringly, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What would you have me do then?

FOOTMAN. You know very well, ma'am, that Sir Anthony is only paying his court to Louisa out of pique that you should have rejected him. You are still the true object of his affections. Reverse the caprice that made you drive him from you, take him back into your favour. He will leave Louisa in an instant. At the same time the nice feeling of honour which dominates all his actions will make him feel he owes her a compensation. How better can he compensate her than by providing for me? His own generosity would naturally prompt him to this course as soon as he hears of my pretensions to Louisa's hand. The help of your persuasion will make the event a certainty.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. H'm, this is not unreasonable, I grant you. But am I to take back your absurd old toad of an uncle? I trust you won't insist on my marrying him, Mr. Branville?

FOOTMAN. Do with him what you will, ma'am. I hand him over to your discretion.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I am vastly obliged to you, sir. Is that all you have to demand of me?

FOOTMAN. It is all I have a right to demand, but I have also something to suggest which I'm sure a person of your generosity of heart will not refuse.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You alarm me, sir. This threatens to become exorbitant.

FOOTMAN. I am thinking, madam, of the Colonel, to whose happiness, as the brother of my Louisa, I cannot be indifferent. You have told me that the interest you took in him was only the product of a passing infatuation—and let me venture to hope that

the same is true of the interest with which you deigned to honour me.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. The vanity of these men! This young toad thinks I'm in love with him. Pho, sir, I don't care that much for you!

FOOTMAN. I am very glad to hear it, ma'am. But to return to my theme; the Colonel and your sister have loved each other long. I suggest it to your generosity that you make it possible for them to consummate this faithful passion by doing something to provide for your sister. Your fortune is so considerable that it is in your power to ensure the happiness of two virtuous and noble creatures without in the slightest degree diminishing your own comfort. You are kind, you are generous, you have a heart.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. My dear young sir, I have nothing of the sort, and I refuse to be preached to any longer.

FOOTMAN. But your sister and the Colonel?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Leave that to me, sir, I shall act as I think fit. And now, Mr. Branville, since you must be going, I can only tell you how infinitely honoured I have been by your visit, how heartily I have enjoyed your conversation, and how—

(There is a noise outside; voices loudly raised.)

Bless me, what's that?

LORD MEDWAY *(voice outside)*. Death and damnation, you rogue, I know for a fact the lady is in. I must see her, I tell you, on business of importance.

(Voices of expostulation.)

FOOTMAN. Lord Medway!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Heavens, he must not find you here. Quickly, behind that screen.

(The Footman slips behind the screen. The door opens and Lord Medway enters.)

This is a very uncivil fashion of paying a visit, my lord.

LORD MEDWAY. Your rogue of a porter denied me the door, as though I had been an importunate creditor. But I knew you must be at home, and in my anxiety to know how my son acquitted himself of his proposal I took the liberty to force an entrance.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, my lord, I suppose might is right. You have stormed and captured my house and now you are in it I can offer no further resistance. I was resting here, and had given orders nobody was to be admitted.

LORD MEDWAY. I crave your pardon, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You have it, monster.

LORD MEDWAY. And now, what of my son?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Your son? Oh, I had quite forgotten his existence; I fancy he is somewhere in the house enjoying a little *tête-à-tête* with Miss Clara.

LORD MEDWAY. And you permit it?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Permit it, my lord, I encourage it.

LORD MEDWAY. You encourage your future husband to pass his time in the company of the mistress he avowedly loves?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Tut, tut, my lord, how pedantic you are become all of a sudden. But I had almost forgotten to tell you: I have changed my mind. I am determined I won't marry Medway after all.

LORD MEDWAY. What, ma'am?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Not so loud, I beg you, dear Lord Medway. My hearing is still perfect.

LORD MEDWAY. You tell me you have changed your mind?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Must I repeat all I have said, or can't you understand at a single hearing, my lord?

LORD MEDWAY. But this is insufferable, ma'am, if you mean what you say seriously.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Surely, my lord, you should know by this time that I am the most serious of women.

LORD MEDWAY. But what is the reason of this sudden change?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I am not accustomed to giving reasons for what I do, my lord. . . .

LORD MEDWAY. But . . . but . . . I don't understand at all, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. That, my lord, does not surprise me in the least.

LORD MEDWAY. And what of Medway?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I propose to leave him to poor dear Clara. Poor girl, she deserves something.

LORD MEDWAY (*getting up and striding about the room*). 'Sdeath ma'am, you put me quite beside myself.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. So I see, my lord!

LORD MEDWAY. I was a fool ever to believe that a woman of your inconstant character could stick to one resolution for more than a day. What new caprice must I be prepared for now?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, my lord, since you ask so kindly, I must tell you that I am thinking of taking Sir Anthony Branville back into my favour. The poor man has positively begun to waste away since I turned him off, and you know I have a soft heart for every kind of animal. I can't bear to see him suffer so.

LORD MEDWAY. This is the last straw. You reject my son for no reason whatsoever, and now you propose to ruin my daughter's one hope of making a good match by luring away the man who is to be her husband. Death and damnation, this is too much, too much!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Hush, hush, my lord, you must not swear in a lady's drawing-room.

LORD MEDWAY. The devil take you and all your intolerable sex! (*He rushes out in a rage.*)

(*Footman emerges.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Dear me, dear me, I think I was never so vilely abused in my life. Did you ever see a man behave so, Mr. Branville?

FOOTMAN. No, ma'am, nor did I ever meet with a woman who had carried the art of being provoking to such a high pitch as you have done.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ah, now you flatter, Mr. Branville.

FOOTMAN. I protest, ma'am, I spoke with all sincerity.
(*A knock at the door.*)

What, another? (*He darts behind the screen.*)

(*Enter Colonel Medway, very pale and immensely determined.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What, Colonel, I thought you were enjoying a tête-à-tête with Miss Clara. Have you grown weary of seriousness that you come to me for a little frivolous chatter?

COLONEL (*clearing his throat for a set speech*). Madam, I must confess that the unexpected suddenness of the declaration I am about to make has its root in causes over which I had no control. It must not be thought, however

MRS. KNIGHTLY. No, no, no, Colonel, I cannot bear it. Keep this eloquence for the House of Lords, to which the demise of your dear father will ultimately raise you. When you speak to me, Colonel, I insist it shall be in periods less richly rotund. Meanwhile, pray go back to Miss Clara and tell her, with my compliments, that I don't propose on any account to marry you.

COLONEL. Madam!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. No, no, not even if you were to ask it on your bended knees. Go, Colonel, go. (*She pushes him towards the door.*) Phew! the man plants his four feet like an ass. Go, go, go! (*She pushes him out.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE TWO

*Lord Medway's house.
Louisa and a Maid discovered.*

MAID. Did you ring, ma'am?

LOUISA. I wanted—I wanted— But where is the footman?

MAID. John is gone out this afternoon, ma'am.

LOUISA. Gone out? This is very strange. Has he leave to go out of an afternoon like this?

MAID. I'm sure I couldn't say, ma'am. John is not at all free with his confidences; he's a quiet young fellow, but I doubt he's sly.

LOUISA. That's enough, Betty. Tell him, when he comes in to bring up the coals.

MAID. I doubt he won't be in yet awhile, ma'am, oh, I very much doubt it! I saw him talking with . . . But there, I beg your pardon, ma'am, I know you don't like hearing the scandal below stairs.

LOUISA. Come back, Betty. You say you saw him talking with some one. Who do you mean, pray?

MAID. Only Mrs. Knightly's woman, ma'am. She's not so old or ugly neither. John's going out may have something to do with her, I'm thinking.

LOUISA. Mrs. Knightly's woman, did you say. Thank you, Betty, you may go.

(Exit Betty.)

He has gone to Mrs. Knightly's. Oh, there's no doubt of it, no doubt of it. What shall I do? Oh, Branville, Branville, I said I would trust you. I do trust, I do . . . at least I try so hard. But, oh . . . I hate that woman, I hate her, hate her, hate her. Oh, I'd like to kill her.

(Enter Sir Anthony Branville.)

SIR ANTHONY. Louisa, if I may be permitted to make use of so endearingly tender an appellation, a lover's passion has brought me back once more to expire at your feet.

LOUISA. Oh, I'm sure I'm very happy and obliged, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. Dear Louisa, my soul kisses your hands.

LOUISA. And mine, Sir Anthony, drops you a curtsy.

SIR ANTHONY. If a lover may be permitted to indulge his curiosity (for it is allowable, I hope, for a man to feel curiosity about the object of his fervid and incessant thoughts), may I ask my Louisa (though I dare not yet call her mine) what extremity of passion was moving her to soliloquy as I entered the room?

LOUISA. Oh, it was nothing, Sir Anthony, nothing I assure you. I was only . . . only reciting poetry.

SIR ANTHONY. Poetry! there is a melting warmth in the very word. I myself (let it not be imputed to an idle vanity if I say so)—I myself have felt more than once the approaches of the divine frenzy.

LOUISA. Indeed, Sir Anthony; and pray, have you published any of your writings?

SIR ANTHONY. Most assuredly not, madam. To the man of feeling, who is also a gentleman, there is a

suggestion (how shall I put it?)—a suggestion, positively, of impudicity in the idea of publication. To expose the raptures and agonies of the heart (judge what they must be, ma'am, in a nature as excessively inflammable as my own), to flaunt them before the public eye, as upon a theatre—this is something unthinkably revolting to a person of my sensibility.

LOUISA. I am sorry, Sir Anthony, I so much as suggested the possibility of it.

SIR ANTHONY. Ah, madam, it is not for you to ask pardon. Like the king, you can do no wrong, at least with me, for you reign the absolute monarch over a heart that (believe me, madam) rejoices in its subjection.

(There is a silence.)

LOUISA. The weather, don't you find, Sir Anthony, has been very disagreeable of late?

SIR ANTHONY. Believe me, madam, I am not aware of it, since I have the felicity to bask in the sunshine of your transcendent beauties. In that happy, albeit yet somewhat distant future when you become my wife (if I may mention that contingency without shocking your virgin modesty) I shall live in a perpetual spring.

LOUISA. You are excessively poetical, Sir Anthony. Would you mind ringing the bell?

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, for you I would do anything. Bid me to die, and I am still your obedient slave.
(He rings the bell.)

LOUISA. Thank you, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. That word overpays me a thousand times for anything I have done or may do hereafter.
(Enter Maid.)

LOUISA. The footman is not back yet, Betty?

MAID. No, ma'am, I will send him to you as soon as he returns. Is there anything I can do for you, ma'am, till he comes?

LOUISA. No, thank you, Betty. You may go.

(Exit Betty. A silence.)

I hope you will have no objection, Sir Anthony, if I go on with my knitting.

SIR ANTHONY. You honour me too much, ma'am, by asking me. It transports me to observe that you add to your native charms and wit the domestic virtues of a Penelope.

LOUISA. You flatter me, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. In your case, Louisa, flattery is impossible; the highest and warmest expressions of praise are but denigrations and disparagements when applied to your inestimable worth.

(Voices without.)

But hist! I hear the voice of that all but irresistible siren, Mrs. Knightly. Her approach exceedingly perturbs me, but 'tis too late to retire.

LOUISA. Mrs. Knightly!

(Enter Mrs. Knightly, Lord and Lady Medway, Colonel Medway and Miss Richly. Sir Anthony bows and averts his head from Mrs. Knightly.)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. So here are the lovebirds at last. What a pretty couple. *(To Lord Medway)* It seems almost a pity to separate them.

LORD MEDWAY. I trust, ma'am, you don't intend to change your mind again. I am too slow to follow your caprices. Your generous resolution with regard to Medway and Clara has left me amazed but satisfied; and I shall be as glad to exchange the uncle for the nephew in this case provided you can guarantee that Sir Anthony will provide for him.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Leave that to me, my lord.

(She advances towards Louisa and Sir Anthony, who are on the opposite side of the room to the door.)

(To Louisa) Have you seen the footman this afternoon, child? *(To Sir Anthony)* What, Sir Anthony, not a look? Have you quite forgotten me?

SIR ANTHONY. Ah, madam, that inquiry comes a little of the latest, I do assure you.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Never too late, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, I hope your lordship is of opinion that I do not deviate from that fidelity I owe your excellent daughter in entering into converse with this lady?

LORD MEDWAY. By no means, sir.

SIR ANTHONY. I flatter myself I am indulged with your ladyship's favourable construction on the same point?

LADY MEDWAY. Without doubt, Sir Anthony.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, Sir Anthony, if you have finished taking legal advice, I shall be glad of taking this opportunity to admit to you, in the face of all this company, that my behaviour towards you in the past has been a little capricious.

SIR ANTHONY. Madam!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. 'Though not more capricious than you deserved, sir.

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, I am not worthy of so great a concession; would to heaven there had never been any occasion given for it.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Alas, Sir Anthony, my repentance comes too late, I see.

SIR ANTHONY. Repentance! Heavens, madam, do you condescend to feel any compunction on this occasion?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, Sir Anthony, compunction is

a strong word. I begin to regret a little, for I find I am not so entirely averse from you as I had once imagined.

SIR ANTHONY. Then, madam, I apprehend it will not be advisable for me to abide within the reach of your influence; I must stop my ears against your allurements.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Not till you have first heard me, my dear toad.

SIR ANTHONY. My dear toad! (*Aside to Lady Medway*) I think I had best depart, Lady Medway.

LADY MEDWAY. No, pray stay, good Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY. There is a great peril in it, I assure your ladyship.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Well, Sir Anthony, since I see it is always I who must make the advances, I own I did not think you would have taken my little capricious coyness for an absolute refusal of your addresses.

SIR ANTHONY. Madam, madam, take care. I am but a man, though I hope not without fortitude to sustain these trials of my virtue and my patience.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. 'Tis I, Sir Anthony, I, the betrayed and deserted fair one, who have most need of fortitude—but go, ungrateful creature.

SIR ANTHONY. Do you hear that, my lord? Before heaven there was never such an enchantress since the days of Armida. She is hung round with spells. I do aver it to you, I am rooted here; I have no power to move, my lord.

COLONEL. Bless me, Sir Anthony, this is strange, this savours of the supernatural.

SIR ANTHONY (*walks about*). I use the word but metaphorically, Colonel; I have not absolutely lost the use of my limbs, thank heaven.

COLONEL. Then, Sir Anthony, you had better use them to retire before it is too late.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ay, do, and carry that love which is mine by right, to Louisa there; but let me tell you, as a punishment of your inconstancy, that her heart is already given away to another.

SIR ANTHONY. 'Tis unlawful of you, madam, to slander an innocent lady's reputation.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. I speak nothing but the truth, Sir Anthony! and what is more, I know your nephew Branville is the man and that she is equally beloved by him.

SIR ANTHONY. My nephew Branville? Never, madam!

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Ask the innocent lady herself.

(They turn to Louisa, who is overwhelmed with confusion.)
Her blushes sufficiently answer us.

SIR ANTHONY. Heavens! Lady Medway, can I believe what this incomprehensible fair one says?

LADY MEDWAY. Sir Anthony, I must own I believe there was an affection between your nephew and my daughter.

SIR ANTHONY. I am thunderstruck, petrified, converted into stone.

LADY MEDWAY. I think, Sir Anthony, there is nothing so extraordinary in the circumstance.

SIR ANTHONY. My lord, passionately as I admire the lady, I would suffer martyrdom rather than solemnize marriage under such inauspicious influences.

COLONEL. You are not pressed to, Sir Anthony.

SIR ANTHONY *(apart to Colonel Medway)*. Colonel, I am not a man of sanguinary spirit, but if my giving up your sister should, in your eyes, render such a measure necessary, I am at your service, either afoot or on horseback—you understand me.

COLONEL. There is no occasion, I assure you, sir.

SIR ANTHONY. I am ready—that's all—my alacrity is pretty notorious on these occasions.

COLONEL. I approve of your punctilio entirely.

SIR ANTHONY. I am proud of your approbation.

My lord, I hope I am also honoured with yours in giving up my pretensions to the fair lady, your daughter?

LORD MEDWAY. Sir, you have my free consent.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Then, Sir Anthony, I am sure you have too much generosity not to promote your nephew's happiness, always provided my lord is willing. . . .

LORD MEDWAY. I have no objections to Mr. Branville, madam—but Sir Anthony knows my inability to give my daughter a fortune equal to her rank.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Come, Sir Anthony, you will not let sordid considerations of money be a bar to the happiness of two faithful lovers.

SIR ANTHONY. Certainly not, madam; I am charmed that my nephew should have had the nobility to condemn riches in comparison with beauty, and if he has my lord's consent, I will render him, in point of fortune, worthy of the lady of his heart.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And now, Sir Anthony, I have a surprise for you. Your nephew is this moment returned from abroad (*repeats to Louisa*)—this moment returned, Louisa, and is waiting below to hear his doom pronounced.

SIR ANTHONY. I am delighted to hear it, ma'am. Let him be sent for to come up immediately.

(*Colonel Medway goes out to fetch him.*)

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And now, ungrateful toad, I hope you will return to your rightful sovereign.

SIR ANTHONY. Arbitress of my fate, thus I reassume my happy bondage. (*He kneels and takes Mrs. Knightly's hand.*)

(*Enter Sir Harry and Lady Flutter.*)

SIR HARRY. What is all this? My uncle in heroics at the widow's feet? My lord, Lady Medway, an explanation quickly, for heaven's sake! What, are you all dumb?

LADY FLUTTER. Dear Mrs. Knightly, I absolutely die with curiosity.

SIR HARRY. My dear, that's a disease will never kill you, for you have been wonderfully subject to it ever since you and I were acquainted.

LADY FLUTTER. Prythee, Sir Harry, let your tongue keep pace with your wit and then you won't talk so fast. . . . Tell me, do, Mrs. Knightly.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You shall know all, Lady Flutter (or at least very nearly all) at a better opportunity. But here comes a new arrival.

(*Enter young Branville, who has changed from livery into gentleman's clothes.*)

LADY FLUTTER. What, more surprises?

SIR ANTHONY. My nephew! Why, sir, I am heartily glad to see you returned thus unexpectedly early.

YOUNG BRANVILLE. The Colonel has told me of your generosity, uncle, and I would thank you, but can find no words to express my gratitude, which, like the love I bear for this lady, is infinite. (*He goes to Louisa.*)

LOUISA. This is like a fairy tale, Branville. Tell me, do I dream, or are all our troubles indeed so miraculously unravelled of a sudden?

YOUNG BRANVILLE. 'Tis true, indeed, Louisa.

LOUISA. But how have you accomplished it?

YOUNG BRANVILLE. Hush! At another time, dear Louisa. Let it suffice that we owe a great debt to this lady (*indicating Mrs. Knightly*).

LOUISA. As do also my brother and Miss Richly. For I understand, ma'am, you have settled the third of your fortune on your sister.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Pooh, that's nothing. 'Twas a little thing that I did very willingly, even as you predicted I should, Mr. Branville. But now, Miss Louisa, a word of warning in your ear. You have, I assure you, one of the most dangerous husbands in the world.

LOUISA. Dangerous, ma'am?

MRS. KNIGHTLY. You will have to have all your wits about you, if you would keep him in good order. Believe me; I know.

LOUISA. I am not afraid, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. Not now, I dare say. But mark my words, if ever you have any trouble with him, come to me. I know the tricks of these toads—understand that, Mr. Branville.

YOUNG BRANVILLE. I understand and tremble, ma'am.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. And now, my lord, are you satisfied with the results of my choppings and changings?

LORD MEDWAY. Perfectly, ma'am, since both my children have married money after all.

(*Creditor rushes in.*)

CREDITOR. My lord, my lord! Ah, your pardon, ladies and gentlemen.

LORD MEDWAY. Well, sir?

CREDITOR. Oh, my lord, 'tis a son. Both doing well, thank God.

LORD MEDWAY. I am glad to hear it, sir. Here's yet

another happy event to crown the day. Two marriages and a birth. Come, how shall we fitly celebrate this joyful occasion?

LADY FLUTTER (*clapping her hands*). A dance, a dance.

CREDITOR. Ay, ma'am, a dance with all my heart. But let it be a country dance, for I cannot abide these solemn slow court dances. Besides, I don't know how to dance them.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. A country dance, then. Sir Anthony, you'll be my partner. I know you can trip it like the best of them.

SIR ANTHONY. I protest, ma'am, I have not indulged in so frivolous and unbecoming an activity since I was a boy.

MRS. KNIGHTLY. What, you surely won't refuse to dance with me. Oh, you ungrateful monster, I'll turn you away again.

SIR ANTHONY. No, no, my adored one. What matter dignity and decorum if you are to be my partner? I'll dance, I'll dance.

SIR HARRY (*to Lady Flutter*). And you shall be my partner.

LADY FLUTTER. What, dance with my own husband? What's a dance for, except to change one's customary partner for a new one? However, if you insist, I needs must be a dutiful wife and obey.

LORD MEDWAY (*to Creditor*). Will you squire Lady Medway, sir? (*To Lady Medway*) Well, my dear, and what do you think of all this?

LADY MEDWAY. I am happy, my lord, in our children's happiness.

LORD MEDWAY. Has the time gone, I wonder, when we could be happy in our own happiness?

LADY MEDWAY. Who knows? Perhaps. . . .

LORD MEDWAY. Perhaps. (*He takes her hand for a moment, then waves his arms.*) Now, ladies and gentlemen, take your places. (*He goes and sits at the harpsichord.*)

LADY FLUTTER. We are ready, my lord.
(*Lord Medway plays. They all dance. Sir Anthony capers grotesquely. In the height of the movement and gaiety the curtain descends.*)

CURTAIN





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